WORLD LOVER, WORLD LEAVER

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES AND THAI BUDDHISM

by

Seree Lorgunpai

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own composition and constitutes the results of my own research.

Seree Lorgunpai
16 January 1995

DEDICATED

to

My parents, wife, son, brothers and sisters who encourage me to live on

ABSTRACT

The Book of Ecclesiastes is unique. This suggests that Qohelet's thought is not, as some scholars have maintained, dependent on other thinkers of his time. Qohelet interacts with and challenges wisdom tradition and other contemporary beliefs. His theology is not limited to Israelite religion. His concern is universal and not confined to the people of Israel. Although Qohelet does not interact directly with the teachings of the Buddha, this thesis argues that the theological content of Ecclesiastes can be profitably studied in comparison with Buddhism. Though the Buddha and Qohelet are separated from each other by time, geography and culture, they share a common focus on human suffering–*dukkha* in Pali, *hebel* in Hebrew. The Buddha maintains that desire is the primary cause of human suffering; Qohelet sees it as deriving from various causes, including human limitations, and the unpredictability of life.

The Buddha looks for a way to end human suffering, recognising that if human beings continue to be reborn in the world, they will continue to suffer. He then suggests that human beings should break the cycle of rebirth (*kamma*) and seek *nibbāna* or the state of emptiness. This state can be reached through strenuous meditation. Qohelet, on the other hand, believes that God has created this world with a definite plan; however, humans lack the capacity to understand the present events of the world and are unable to predict the future. Qohelet advises human beings to enjoy life on a day-to-day basis, rather than hope for a better future. While admitting that there are many unpleasant things in this world, Qohelet still loves living in it. He is much more in and of this world than is the Buddha. Seeing that the pleasant things in this world are transitory (*anicca*) and illusory, the Buddha decided to leave the world behind. Qohelet is the world lover. The Buddha is the world leaver.

This thesis has three main parts. Part one discusses the nature of the Book of Ecclesiastes in detail. Beginning with a general review of scholarly opinion on the book, the discussion continues with the status of its author, its audiences, its style and language, its structure and purposes. Though these discussions are not used in the comparison, they are important for understanding Qohelet's thought. Two chapters which are essential for the later comparison include a discussion of the key words of the book and its main teachings. Part two provides the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand and discusses the main concepts of Buddhism, including *kamma, anicca, dukkha, anattā,* meditation, *arahant* and *nibbāna.* Part three compares the two traditions. A detailed comparison is undertaken in the following areas: Qohelet's understanding of God and the Law of *Kamma,* the theological implication of *Hebel* and *Dukkha,* Observation and Meditation as ways of encountering the world, the Sages and *Arahants* as interpreters, Work and Merit-making as human activities, and Joy and *Nibbāna* as responses to what humankind has been given.

This thesis aims to help Thai Christians to find some common ground for dialogue with Thai Buddhists and to open up the much-neglected area of Jewish-Buddhist dialogue.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.	*Anguttara-Nikāya*
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,* ed. by J. B. Pritchard, 2nd., Princeton, 1955
Aram.	Aramaic
b.	Babylonian Talmud
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*
BH	Biblical Hebrew
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CBQ	*The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
Cant.	Canticum (Song of Songs)
1 Ch. (Chr.)	1 Chronicles
2 Ch. (Chr.)	2 Chronicles
Dan.	Daniel
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Eccl.	Ecclesiastes
Ex.	Exodus
Ezek.	Ezekiel
EvQ	*The Evangelical Quarterly*
ET	*The Expository Times*
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienes*
Gen.	Genesis
GKC	Gesenius, F. W. *Hebrew Grammar.* rev.by E.Kautzsch; 2nd English edition, edited and translated by A. E. Cowley. Oxford, 1910.
Hab.	Habakkuk
Hag.	Haggai
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* ed. by G. A. Buttrick, 4 vols., Nashville, 1962
Int	*Interpretation*
Is. (Isa.)	Isaiah
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literarure*
Je. (Jer.)	Jeremiah
Josh.	Joshua
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*

JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
Judg.	Judges
1 Kgs.	1 Kings
2 Kgs.	2 Kings
Lev.	Leviticus
Lam.	Lamentations
LXX	The Septuagint
M.	*Majjhima Nikāya*
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew
NEB	*The New English Bible*
Neh.	Nehemiah
NIV	*The New International Version of the Bible*
Prov.	Proverbs
Ps.	Psalms
1QS	Rule of the Community (Dead Sea Scroll)
1QSa	Rule of the Congregation (Dead Sea Scroll)
RSV	*The Revised Standard Version of the Bible*
S. of S.	Song of Songs
1 Sam.	1 Samuel
2 Sam.	2 Samuel
Sir.	Sirach
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* ed. by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, Grand Rapids, 1974-
TrinJ	*Trinity Journal*
Vin.	Vinayapitaka
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebräistik*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
Zech.	Zechariah
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

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INTRODUCTION

As a Thai Christian who grew up in Thailand where the majority of the population claim to be Buddhists, I always thought that Christian teachings seemed to be in conflict with Buddhist modes of thinking. The official belief of most Thai people is Theravāda Buddhism which holds teachings derived from Pali scripture.[1] Although I was born in a Christian family, most of my life I was in contact with Thai Buddhists. Most of my neighbours, relatives and friends were Buddhists. Even though I went to a Christian school, I had to take many courses on Buddhism because it was compulsory under Thai law. Similarly, the majority of my classmates were Buddhists. Moreover, Thai people usually think that Christianity is the religion of the West. When religious belief is discussed by Christians and Buddhists in Thailand, Christians try to convert Buddhists by using foreign concepts. But there are some Christian concepts which Thai Buddhists cannot understand. For instance, the idea that Christ died for our sins, that Christ has prepared a place for believers in heaven, and that God is the creator of this world which one day will be destroyed then renewed by God. But each of these ideas is incompatible with basic Buddhist belief. According to Buddhist teaching, everyone will obtain the fruit of what he has done; no one can produce fruits for another. The highest goal in life for Buddhists is *nibbāna*, not to go to heaven. Buddhists are agnostics; they believe that this world has come about by itself. They do not even care whether God exists or not. Instead, they believe in the law of *kamma*. The end of the world is inconceivable, since there is still reincarnation for those who do not reach the state of *nibbāna*.

One of the causes that hindered Thai Buddhists from understanding Christian concepts is that missionaries and Thai evangelists tended to have a New Testament bias. The New Testament was translated before the Old Testament and was used more frequently in dialogue with Buddhists. Ecclesiastes was one of the last books to be translated, perhaps because the translators were not aware of the similarity between it and Buddhism or because they just chose to ignore it. Even now Ecclesiastes is not used as much as it could be, being used in Thailand mostly at funeral services.

My interest in Ecclesiastes began when I was a student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the United States, but at that time I was not able to find enough material to help me understand it. My aspiration to uncover the meaning of Ecclesiastes increased after I returned to Thailand and encountered many Buddhist concepts. I also taught Ecclesiastes to students at Bangkok Institute of Theology. The

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[1]For that reason Buddhist terms in this thesis are in Pali rather than Sanskrit.

more I read Ecclesiates the more I saw the connection between its teachings and those of Thai Buddhism. Western Christians probably regard Ecclesiastes as one of the "strange" books of the Old Testament, but when Thais read it they feel at home because they find familiar teachings. Sadly, the Thai Church makes little use of this book. Buddhists might respond positively to its teachings, but they do not know that Ecclesiastes exists. The aims of this thesis are therefore to raise Thai Christian awareness about the usefulness of Ecclesiastes, to introduce Ecclesiastes to Thai Buddhists, and thereby to provide common ground for Christian-Buddhist dialogue.

Some scholars in the past have noticed the similarity between Ecclesiates and Buddhism. In 1895, E. J. Dillon indicated that the reader of Ecclesiastes cannot ignore the significant fact that the sceptically ideal basis of Qohelet's metaphysics is identical with that of the Buddha.[2] Dillon also suggested that Qohelet considers the Buddhist idea of absolute nothingness (*nibbāna*) as the only real good.[3] In 1932, Streeter saw that the personal testimony in Ecclesiastes 2:4ff. is similar to the biography of the Buddha.[4] He also thought that Qohelet had the idea of rebirth or transmigration (*kamma*) in mind when he said "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9-10).[5] However, these scholars did not delineate the similarity in detail. This thesis will therefore attempt to fill the gap by providing a more detailed comparison of Ecclesiastes and Thai Buddhism.

The first part of the thesis is a detailed study of the teachings of Ecclesiastes. Chapter one reviews scholarly opinion. The complex and varied nature of the book necessitates that these opinions differ on virtually every matter, whether origin, dating, structure, influences, genre, or whatever. Indeed, sceptics and pietists alike have adduced this book in support of their views. Chapter two suggests that there was a professional class of sages in Israel, of which the author of Ecclesiastes, Qohelet was a member. Chapter three argues that internal evidence in Ecclesiastes suggests that Qohelet intentionally wrote for a number of different audiences. Chapter four investigates some aspects of language and literary style in Ecclesiastes, which enable us to interpret some of its more difficult passages. Chapter five suggests that although the structure of Ecclesiastes is not easily discernable, it has nonetheless been carefully composed in such a way as to emphasise its major themes. Chapter six examines key words such as הֶבֶל (futility), רָאָה (to see), יָדַע (to know), מָצָא (to find), חָכָם (wise), עָמָל (labour) and עָשָׂה (to work). These words encapsulate Qohelet's major themes and

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[2]Dillon, (1895), 7.
[3]Dillon, (1895), 111.
[4]Streeter, (1932), 63.
[5]Streeter, (1932), 64.

enable them to be readily compared with Buddhist ideas. Chapter seven suggests that Ecclesiastes is significantly different from the rest of the Old Testament on three essential issues: concept of God, enjoyment of life, and death.

The second part of the thesis is a detailed study of the main teaching of Buddhism. Chapter eight provides an introduction to Thai Buddhism from its origin to the present. Chapter nine discusses the doctrine of *kamma,* the law of cause and effect, a belief which Buddhism shares with Hinduism. Buddhists use this to account for issues of fate that cannot be rationally explained. Chapter ten investigates the meanings of three related Pali words: *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anattā* (no soul). Their relationship is like a triangle, with *dukkha* at the peak while *anicca* and *anattā* are at the bottom. Buddhists use the concepts to explain the cause of suffering and the way to its cessation. Chapter eleven examines Buddhist meditation, a spiritual journey that each individual takes. For Buddhists, meditation is the only way to the state of *nibbāna,* the highest spiritual goal. Chapter twelve evaluates the *arahant,* the Buddhist saint. According to Buddhist belief, a meditator who attains enlightenment during the course of his or her lifetime becomes an *arahant.* Chapter thirteen describes the idea of *nibbāna* particularly in Theravāda Buddhism. *Nibbāna* can be defined as the destruction of lust, hatred and illusion.

The third part of this thesis compares six essential themes in Ecclesiastes and Thai Buddhism: (1) God and the Law of *Kamma*; (2) *Hebel* and *Dukkha*; (3) Observation and Meditation; (4) The Sages and *Arahants*; (5) Work and Merit-making; (6) Joy and *Nibbāna*. It is concluded that both views accept the fact of universal suffering of the human condition, but differ in their responses. Qohelet would live his life to the full. The Buddha would leave the world behind.

The material in part one is more extensive than that in part two because this thesis is primarily written for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the department of Hebrew and Old Testament Studies and it is clear that several issues of scholarly debate need to be carefully examined before a comprehensive understanding of Ecclesiastes can be attempted.

Part One

Chapter One

Review of Scholarly Opinion on Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is one of the latest books in the Old Testament, and one of the most difficult to interpret. Scott claims that "Ecclesiastes is the strangest book in the Bible, or at any rate the book whose presence in the sacred canons of Judaism and of Christianity is most inexplicable".[1] Qohelet's "witty style" has made his thought susceptible to almost every possible interpretation, as suggested by Bickerman.[2] Davidson agrees with Bickerman, and says "Of no book of the Bible is it more true than of Ecclesiastes that people have tended to read into it what they want to hear, and to get out of it what agrees with their own prejudices and convictions".[3] Thus this book is used by both sceptics and pietists to support their views. Consequently it seems almost impossible to understand the main ideas of the whole book. It is not surprising that scholars have very different opinions about Qohelet's teaching. Crenshaw thinks that Qohelet's views are radically contrasted with earlier teachings expressed in the book of Proverbs.[4] Whybray, on the other hand, suggests that Qohelet's ideas were not original because some of them were already commonplaces of Greek philosophical and quasi-philosophical literature, while others are found in older literature such as the Epic of Gilgamesh.[5] Whybray says "Qoheleth was no atheist, nor did he regard God as irrelevant to human affairs. He took for granted not only the existence but also the omnipotence of the one God. In this belief he did not deviate in the least from the Jewish faith of his time".[6] Surely, Davidson would not agree with Whybray because he says "The author of the book was well aware, as we shall see, of the traditional faith and religious teaching that had shaped his people's life. Such things, however, no longer seem to ring bells for him".[7] No matter how scholars think about his work Qohelet "does not seem aware that his teachings are unorthodox: he neither flaunts his audacity nor screens his unconventionality from his audience, 'the

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[1]Scott (1965), 192.
[2]Bickerman (1967), 142.
[3]Davidson (1986), 3.
[4]Crenshaw (1987), 23.
[5]Whybray (1989), 23.
[6]Whybray (1989), 27.
[7]Davidson (1986), 5.

people'".[8] It is not easy to prove that Qohelet is consistently pious or consistently sceptical and pessimistic. We may need to accept that there are tensions in the book, tensions not only with earlier Israelite wisdom but also tension created by the initial impact of Hellenistic thought and culture on Jews.

One reason that scholars hold such contrasting opinions is the nature of the book. We hardly find any books in the Old Testament to compare with Ecclesiastes. Bickerman thinks it "soon became outdated just because it was so up to date at the time of its appearance".[9] On one hand Bickerman's suggestion about the outdated nature of the book seems correct; because of its unique character the rabbis misunderstood Ecclesiastes, and its Greek translator did not understand it either. On the other hand his suggestion about the outdated nature of the book is inadequate, because Ben Sira when he wrote Ecclesiasticus seems to have been familiar with Ecclesiastes. This implies that Ecclesiastes was still well-known in Ben Sira's period. Also, when one reads the book, one does not find exact historical events. Ecclesiastes seems like a timeless document, for the author usually makes judgments from general observations–notice Qohelet's favourite phrase, "under the sun". He does not give specific instructions for certain circumstances. He gives many examples and much advice in the form of "A is better than B". He stimulates his audience with questions and lets them make up their own minds. His teachings are open-ended rather than rigid instructions. Therefore we can say that for us, this book is both up to date and out of date, for it "half reveals [generally] and half conceals [specially]".[10]

Another reason for differences among scholars is that there are startling contradictions in the book; the cool scepticism of one passage is followed by apparently orthodox sentiments in the next. The contradictions were discernible to its earliest readers, since some Rabbis raised objections to its canonicity because "its words contradicted one another".[11] There are several ways to solve these contradictions. Several of the Church Fathers and medieval exegetes explained these contradictions as being due to debate or dialogue between men of varying standpoints.[12] Though Crenshaw agrees that Qohelet does describe an opponent's views, he thinks that the book presents a monologue rather than a dialogue.[13] It seems that Qohelet uses the soliloquy technique to express his thought to the public to stimulate thinking. Many

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[8]Fox (1989), 9.
[9]Bickerman (1967), 141.
[10]Gordis (1955), vii.
[11]Cf. *b. Shabb.* 30b.
[12]Gordis (1955), 70.
[13]Crenshaw (1987), 29.

times, Qohelet does not agree with conventional wisdom. Crenshaw uses Ecclesiastes 7:1, "A good reputation is preferable to expensive ointment, and the hour of death, to that of birth", to demonstrate that Qohelet takes over conventional wisdom and gives it a new twist.[14] The first line of this verse is common in conventional wisdom; but the second line is Qohelet's addition. Most people would accept that having a good reputation is better than having a lot of money, but they would not willingly accept that to die is better than to live. Qohelet probably wants to argue with the teachers of traditional wisdom. Also, Whybray thinks the tensions within the book existed within Qohelet's mind.[15] He remarks that "Qoheleth was attempting to reconcile his own experience of life and of the world with the traditional wisdom tradition which he inherited, and that he offers no universal or satisfactory answer to these problems".[16] Murphy looks at the contradictions in the book as the "crisis" of Qohelet.[17] He states that "there is present in Israelite wisdom a basic paradox: make every effort to be wise, but do not be certain".[18]

Ogden points out that contradictory sayings are commonly found in wisdom material. He explains that:

> Because wisdom sayings are not able to encompass all the complexities of human experience in one pithy saying, wisdom literature tends to contain a number of apparently contradictory sayings. An example from Prov. 26.4-5 will make the point obvious. Being situationally governed, there are times or occasions when one kind of advice is appropriate and others when that same advice would be counter-productive. In such a circumstance, the opposite advice would be fitting.[19]

The point that Ogden makes is that the advice given is governed by the situation and so it would be possible to understand Qohelet's contradictions if we knew the situation for which he gives advice. Also we have to find out to whom Qohelet gives this advice. It seems possible that there is more than one group of people who listen to Qohelet's advice. On one occasion he suggests that the aborted child is better off than the man who lives a very long life (Eccl. 6:3-6). It seems possible that Qohelet gives this advice to the rich who do not get satisfaction. On another occasion he suggests that for a man who is counted among the living there is still hope: "remember, a live dog is better than a dead lion" (9:4). This advice is probably given to those who are willing to listen and

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[14]Crenshaw (1987), 29.
[15]Whybray (1989), 18.
[16]Whybray (1989), 18-19.
[17]Murphy (1979), 236.
[18]Murphy (1979), 236.
[19]Ogden (1987), 10-11. Cf. Gordis [(1955), 75-76], who suggests that the intermingling of conventional and unconventional wisdom in one literary unit is amply attested in Babylonian and Egyptian wisdom as well.

change the way they live. It seems like Qohelet contradicts himself, but actually he does not. Life, according to Qohelet, is meaningful if human beings know how to enjoy it; but if they do not know how, it is better to die than to continue to live.

At the beginning of his discussion of the book, Bickerman suggests that Qohelet may have addressed a crowd on the street. If so, Qohelet would not have been unique in this regard, because there were several Greek philosophers (Eg. Crates, Menippus, or Bion) who did the same thing. In order to attract attention from the crowd, these philosophers had to shout. In order to help the crowd to remember their teachings they uttered maxims which sounded like paradoxes.[20] But further on, Bickerman writes that "Qohelet addressed affluent hearers, not to share wealth with others, but to share it with his own body [*sic*]".[21] Bickerman may have forgotten what he had said at the beginning of his work and jumped to this conclusion. This may simply be an error on his part or he may have intended to suggest that it is possible that Qohelet addressed at least two groups of people. By contrast, Garrett thinks Qohelet did not directly address the lower classes, but spoke to those who had dealings with the king.[22]

Not only is contradiction found in wisdom material, it is also found in Lamentations where faith and doubt are in juxtaposition.[23] Provan explains:

> The 'orthodox' view of suffering is present throughout the book: suffering is the punishment of God for sin, and the correct response to it is humble acceptance of the situation and repentance, trusting God's love (e.g. 1:8-9; 3:21-27, 40-42). Even the narrator, however, in whose contributions this view is most consistently adhered to, is in a turmoil of doubt (chapter 3); while in the speeches of Zion and her people, questions are raised, explicitly or implicitly, which are far-reaching. There is doubt as to God's even-handedness in the administration of justice and as to the appropriateness of punishment with regard to the crime (1:22; 2:20); as the extent to which he is even in control of the situation (3:34-36); and as to whether hope for the future is misplaced (5:22). While there is apparently acknowledgment of sin, it does not seem so wholehearted as in the speeches of the narrator, being accompanied by reproach of God for his actions (2:20-22; 5:2-3, 5). The contribution of the people in the fifth poem, indeed, illustrates the tenor of these speeches well...The 'orthodox' view in the end does not prevail.[24]

The contradictions in the book caused scholars several decades ago to doubt the unity of the book. It was suggested that it contained glosses added on by later editors. It was also argued that the book is an accumulation of shorter pieces written over a long period of time reflecting the different moods of the author. But Murphy suggests that,

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[20]Bickerman (1967), 143-144.
[21]Bickerman (1967), 165.
[22]Garrett (1987), 177.
[23]Provan (1991), 23.
[24]Provan (1991), 23.

"the claim for glossing is too arbitrary to deal with; there is no firm way of controlling the reconstruction of an 'original' book of Qohelet".[25]

The other significant explanation offered by scholars to account for the contradictions in Ecclesiastes is that Qohelet has used many quotations. Clearly, he cites various proverbs for the purpose of discussion.[26] However, there is no marking of quotations, explicit or implied, in the Hebrew text of Ecclesiastes. Sometimes Qohelet quotes parts of conventional proverbs, and adds his own endings. For example: "A good name is better than good ointment and the day of death is better than the day of birth" (7:1). Most people who read the book of Proverbs would recognize the saying in 7:1a as a saying of conventional wisdom, and 7:1b as invented by Qohelet. It is obvious that Qohelet uses quotations, but we have to consider carefully whether or not he agrees with the view quoted. The quotation theory can be used by different scholars to support their conflicting opinions about Qohelet's thought. Therefore the quotation hypothesis does not fully solve the problem of the contradictions.[27]

Instead of finding ways to solve this problem, Ellul suggests that we must read and understand Ecclesiastes on the basis of the principle of contradiction, which is the key to its mode of thinking.[28] It seems that Qohelet recognises that contradiction is a necessary condition for communication.[29]

The other characteristic of the book that makes it unique is its literary genre. The Jewish editors and the Greek translators had an opposite opinion as Loader points out:

> The Jewish editors who prepared the text of the Old Testament received the book not as poetry but as prose, as we can tell from the accent marks they added to the vowels, using a system that differs from the one they applied to poetical books. The Greek translators of the Old Testament, however, listed Ecclesiastes among the poetic books and so indicated that they held a different opinion. Literary analysis has shown that the Greek translators of the book were correct: in Ecclesiastes we are indeed dealing with poetry, but it is poetry that displays an unusual metrical pattern and even more unusual form. This is by no means surprising for an unusual form is appropriate for unusual contents.[30]

It is clear that there are poetic portions in the book, but there is also prose. Eaton points out that "Ecclesiastes is not only a collection of wisdom material; it is also a narrative".[31] Therefore we cannot find a single genre for the book. It is easier to

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[25]Murphy (1979), 235. For a detailed discussion see Fox (1989), 23-25.
[26]Gordis(1955), 74, and Ogden, (1987), 11.
[27]Fox (1989), 28
[28]Ellul (1990), 40.
[29]Ellul (1990), 41.
[30]Loader (1986), 4.
[31]Eaton (1983), 21.

recognise various subgenres for Ecclesiastes than to recognise a single genre. Dell classifies the book into three principal smaller genres: wisdom sayings, instruction, and reflection.[32] The genre 'reflection' is "a characteristic of Ecclesiastes alone (the other 'smaller genres' above also characterize other wisdom books)".[33] "This genre 'reflection' both includes traditional wisdom elements and provides room for Qoheleth's own remarks which give the book its distinctiveness. This is Qoheleth's new contribution".[34] Loader identifies 12 subgenres in Ecclesiastes: true sayings; "better than" sayings; "as...so" comparisons; metaphor; parable; allegory; observation; autobiographical narrative; woe-cry; antilogion; rhetorical questions; and admonition.[35] For him, the antilogion is "a particularly interesting genre, because it contains an apparent contradiction between two opposites ... The same phenomenon occurs in Proverbs 26:4 and 5 ... and in certain Sumerian proverbs".[36] Loader sees Qohelet as a wisdom teacher who stands squarely in the tradition of eastern wisdom, because he thinks that these genres are typical forms of wisdom literature.[37] Dell seems to take Loader's point, but she expands further:

> Much of Qoheleth's protesting nature comes therefore from the unusual features of his own style in which forms are placed in a new context, a technique perhaps best described as a reuse of forms since the content of the forms remains the same (both content and context have to be changed to constitute a misuse of forms). Repetition of phrases such as 'pursuit after wind', 'under the sun', and 'eat and drink' and repetition of favourite words such as vanity, do/deed, wise/wisdom, good, time, etc are a main characteristic of this author's style alongside his reflective interpolations,as are the 'yes, but' passages recognized principally by Hertzberg. This is the technique by which one statement modifies another without simply contradicting it: for example in 3:17 there is an affirmation of divine justice which follows the statement of the existence of injustice in 3:16.[38]

Indeed, Dell thinks that Qohelet uses forms predominantly from the wisdom tradition and does not depart from them. But he reuses them in a new context which leads to a change in their meaning. For her Qohelet spoils the form by adding his own viewpoint to the end of it and she shows that he is not altogether following the traditional wisdom line.[39] Because of its radical nature, she suggests that this book should be grouped under 'protest literature' instead of 'wisdom literature'.[40] Though Loader sees that

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[32]Dell (1991), 138-140.
[33]Dell (1991), 140.
[34]Dell (1991), 140.
[35]Loader (1986), 5-7.
[36]Loader (1986), 7.
[37]Loader (1986), 7.
[38]Dell (1991), 140-141.
[39]Dell (1991), 144.
[40]Dell (1991), 147.

Qohelet uses the forms of wisdom literature, he thinks that Qohelet abandons the religious concepts of the Jewish people. He suggests that Ecclesiastes shows that a reaction to wisdom ideas, which become normative and fixed, is inevitable and usually ends with an enormous protest.[41] But Eaton does not agree with Dell and Loader, for he thinks that Qohelet wrote this book in defence of faith in the God of Israel.[42] Qohelet might do both things at the same time; criticise the fossilized beliefs of conventional wisdom about God, and give another picture of God that might fit the reality of the life of his contemporaries. Eaton also points out that when Qohelet refers to 'God', the Hebrew is rarely אֱלֹהִים (three instances only); it is normally הָאֱלֹהִים, 'the God', the one who is known to him, the only one that he recognises.[43] However, this observation is not as significant as Eaton suggests because elsewhere in the Old Testament both words are used without any clear distinction. In Gen. 5:24 and 6:11-12, both words are used in the context to refer to the same "God". Further on, Eaton compares the work of Qohelet to the sermon of Paul to pagan philosophers in Acts 17 and suggests that Qohelet's work is a pre-evangelistic message, leading to faith along a pathway of conviction of need.[44] It might not be Qohelet's intention to convert other groups of people to Jewish belief; however, his message which is dealing with the problem of life seems to reach a wider audience, both Jews and foreigners who came to Palestine for business reasons. If we accept that Ecclesiastes was written in the third century B.C.E., these foreigners were groups of Macedonians and Greeks who settled mainly in the cities along the coast and in Transjordan through which most trade and caravan routes ran.[45] Since Qohelet's message is universal, we might be able to accept Loader's implication that the book is important for the modern reader especially those who believe there is a God but do not trust in him and those who are critically opposed to the church and its theology, because Qohelet is their friend, yet his attitude is biblical.[46] Qohelet is not opposing God, but he is opposing the system that describes God in a rigid way.

Another major division amongst scholars is over the structure of the book. Ginsberg declares that there are exactly four main divisions (excluding the Superscription and Epilogue) in the book.[47] He divides the body of the book as follows:

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[41]Loader (1986), 14.
[42]Eaton (1983), 23.
[43]Eaton (1983), 47.
[44]Eaton (1983), 47.
[45]Jagersma (1985), 24-25.
[46]Loader (1986), 15-16.
[47]Ginsberg (1955), 139.

A. All is zero. The only plus there is for man is the utilization of his goods,1:2-2:26.
B. All happenings are foreordained, but never fully foreseeable. Therefore the only plus there is for man is the utilization of his goods, 3:1-4:3.
A'. A pendant to A, 4:4-6:9.
B'. A pendant to B, 6:10-12:8.[48]

Brown attempts to demonstrate that Ecclesiastes possesses a remarkable, architectonic unity with each verse set like a jewel in a crown, or finely stitched like a knot in a Persian carpet.[49] He focuses on the cluster of words and ideas at parallel positions in adjoining and complementary passages.[50] He demonstrates that there are at least four chiasmi in the book. Finally, he says, "the genius of Ecclesiastes is its unusual, careful utilization of both space and time, that is, the development of both a highly developed symmetry and a closely reasoned, logical, sequence of thought".[51] Loader, however, sees no logical development of thought reflected in the composition of the book, though he does think there are various separate pericopes.[52] After analysing the literary style of the book, he suggests that the tension in the contents and between the contents and formal aspects testify to the tension between the views of Qohelet and those of the conventional wisdom.[53] De Jong suggests that the structure of the book can be described adequately if we assume not just one structuring principle, but several. And also we should not expect absolute consistency and systematization.[54] He, then, separates the contents of the book into two groups: observation complex and instruction complex; admitting that the borders between the complexes are not always as clear as one would wish.[55] Whybray, in yet another difference of opinion, sees no progression of thought from one section to another. Rather, a certain cyclical tendency is observable.[56] Finally in Crenshaw's judgment no one has succeeded in delineating the plan of the book, for it certainly has characteristics inherent in a collection of sentences.[57]

However, though the question of the total structure of the book still remains unresolved, we can still recognise evidence for some structures in the book when we examine those instances when רָאִיתִי (I see) is used with the phrase תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ (under

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[48]Ginsberg (1955), 139.
[49]Brown (1990), 195.
[50]Brown (1990), 196.
[51]Brown (1990), 208.
[52]Loader (1979), 9.
[53]Loader (1979), 116.
[54]De Jong (1992), 107-108.
[55]De Jong (1992), 108-109.
[56]Whybray (1989), 17.
[57]Crenshaw (1987), 47.

the sun). Most often, when used together, this combined phrase introduces a new idea or observation.[58] There are many repetitions of phrases in Ecclesiastes, such as: "there is nothing better than to eat and drink"; "this also is futile and chasing after wind". It is very difficult to conceive that this book has no structure. We should investigate whether Qohelet has structured the book or an editor has grouped the similar sayings together. One can read the entire book in one sitting and the contradicting ideas seem obvious. It seems that these contradicting ideas were intentionally placed by Qohelet to investigate and compare them. Qohelet also uses contradicting ideas to support his argument. For example, in 5:18, Qohelet points out that wealth and possesions are gifts from God; in 6:2, however, he regards them as futile since God does not give a person ability to consume them. The structure of Ecclesiastes may be non-linear but this does not exclude the possibility that the movement of argument may achieve its ends by pursuing more circuitous routes. Ellul comments:

> How, then, does this book that follows no order give the appearance of granite-like solidity and coherence, of systematic thought?...Should we compare him to a film in which flashbacks and symbolic film language lead us to associate two widely separated sequences, thanks to a symbol that appears in both? In this case, we would have an order we could not represent in outline form, because it does not resemble an erector-set model. It would consist of irony, metaphor, metonym, anticipation, and winks from the author!
>
> Following this "order" we find a kind of deliberate dispersal of some twenty central themes. Throughout the book the thoughts relate to each other from within variegated sections. The author raises questions and only several chapters later answers them, in an interplay of echoes. By means of this subtle intermingling, Qohelet aims at nudging the hearer toward an unavoidable conclusion, not at some artistic effect. I believe he does everything in view of a predetermined purpose. If I am right, we must above all avoid skipping over any part of the text or reducing any of it to some vague moral or metaphysical lesson. Every step counts, and we must take each one along with the author.
>
> I find that coherence of this text stems from a kind of woven texture rather than a logical plan, and I believe I can perceive a texture in Qohelet something like that of a complex variegated piece of cloth. You cannot find the beginning, the end, or the direction of the pattern, but such a weave blends its components in a surprising way. Our surprise does not spring from any tangling of the threads (since this would ruin the cloth), but rather from the threads' appearing here and there. These strands surface, suddenly cropping up from their surroundings, but we realize they were there all the time, underneath. Because of their presence (visible or not), the whole is coherent and is not just a collection of proverbs, recommendations, and occasional trite sayings. Such an arrangement would explain why we find the same themes repeated in such a way as to defy forcing the text into an outline. We find work, for instance, in chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, and 11. Happiness appears in chapters 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 11; power in chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 10. And I could add the lists of chapters dealing with money, property, death, and language.[59]

Since the characteristics of Ecclesiastes are so different from those we find in the majority of the Hebrew Bible, many scholars tend to think that Qohelet was

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[58]Cf. 3:16; 4:1; 5:12; 6:1; 9:13; 10:5.
[59]Ellul (1990), 35-36.

influenced by other cultures. Fredericks points out that the most popular determinant for the dating of Ecclesiastes, apart from its language, has been its influences. Many individual philosophers and schools have been adduced as sources.[60] Hengel points out that influence from the Greek world of ideas is seen in Qohelet more than in other Old Testament work.[61] However, we again find differing opinions among scholars. Ranston concludes that "the evidence strongly suggests that Ecclesiastes was not widely or deeply acquainted with the early Greek literature, i.e. he had not read much of it".[62] Whybray sees no evidence that Qohelet was familiar with the Greek language: no Greek word or idiom appears in his book.[63] Gordis states "that thinking men in different cultures, possessing similar temperaments, will develop parallel attitudes on the basic issues of life is so self-evident a truth that it should have been a truism in Biblical scholarship. Hence, the theory of Buddhist influence on Qohelet has rightly won [only] few adherents".[64] Dillon strongly thinks that Qohelet was acquainted, and to some extent imbued, with the doctrines of Gautama Buddha.[65] However, in Qohelet's day (approximately between fifth and second B.C.E.), Greek culture was an aggressive world-view, which exerted a powerful attraction on the finest minds of the Mediterranean littoral.[66] Hence it is not strange to find a resemblance in ideas between Qohelet and such a Greek gnomic writer as Theognis of Megara (6th cent. B.C.E.).[67] It seems to me that Qohelet's thought is quite original and independent. He might read and learn the ideas from others, but he did not copy them. He presents the facts of life in his own way. The similarity between Qohelet's thought and Buddhism may arise from the universal experiences or ideas that were carried by merchants from region to region possibly through the silk route.[68]

Another way to grasp the differences between Ecclesiastes and the majority of the Old Testament is to identify the differences between pre-exilic Israel and Judaism (the practices, ideas, and institutions that formed and still form the basis of the Jewish religion).[69] Most scholars date this book according to its language, to between fifth and the second century B.C.E. Gordis places this book around the first half of the

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[60]Fredericks (1988), 2-3.
[61]Hengel (1973), 115.
[62]Ranston (1925), 149-150.
[63]Whybray (1989), 12.
[64]Gordis (1955), 54.
[65]Dillon (1895), 122.
[66]Gordis (1955), 56.
[67]Gordis (1955), 56.
[68]For detail about the 'silk route', see Roderick Whitfield and Anne Farrer, *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas: Chinese Art from the Silk Route* (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), 9-10.
[69]Cohen, (1987), 21.

third century. His reason is the impression of a stable, apparently permanent political condition.[70] That would mean Qohelet's thought arose in a peaceful period similar to the period when the Buddha found his truths of life. Whybray seems to give the same dating, but his reasons, depend on language, tone and style of argument, and the book's place in the history of thought.[71] But Whitley suggests a date within the period 152-145 B.C.E., by arguing that the syntax, vocabulary and usage of much of the book indicate a time when the Hebrew language was in a state of transition from biblical to Mishnaic Hebrew, and contained a considerable admixture of Aramaic.[72] On the other extreme, Fredericks dates the book in the pre-exilic era, in the eighth or seventh century B.C.E. His research suggests that no accumulation of linguistic evidence speaks against a pre-exilic date.[73] However, the whole milieu of the book suggests a very late date of composition.[74] Ecclesiastes presupposes a long period of peace, in which a man can gather riches and enjoy life. But it should not be later than 180 B.C.E. because Ben Sira knew Ecclesiastes, and fragments of it were found at Qumran.[75] Hengel dates Ecclesiastes between 270 and 220 B.C.E., according to the evidence from the Zeno papyri which demonstrates that considerable political and economic activity was developing in Palestine; this could not in the end fail to make its mark in the intellectual sphere.[76] Thus, there must have been a significant shift in the society.

In many respects, Judaism is the continuation of Israelite religion: a common belief in the one supreme God who created the world; both the Israelites and the Jews are God's chosen people; both entered into a covenantal relationship with God; both inherited the holy land; and both observed the same sacred calender.[77] However, several significant changes had occurred. Socially, pre-exilic Israel was a tribal society living on its ancestral land. Those who did not belong to the tribe could not own the land alloted exclusively to the members of that tribe. The rights of citizenship depended exclusively on birth. But when the Jews returned from Babylonia they returned not as tribes but as clans. The entire tribal structure was destroyed. Many Jews lived outside Palestine. As a result of these changes, Judaism became religion rather than

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[70]Gordis (1955), 64.
[71]Whybray (1989), 4-12.
[72]Whitley (1979), 148.
[73]Fredericks (1988), 262-263.
[74]Hengel (1974), 115.
[75]Hengel (1974), 115.
[76]Hengel (1974), 116.
[77]Cohen (1987), 21.

nationality. Then it was possible for foreigners to be admitted into "citizenship" through "conversion".[78]

Religiously, pre-exilic Israel worshipped in the temple through the slaughter and roasting of animals, performed mostly by the priests.[79] For as long as the temple remained standing, Judaism maintained the sacrificial cult, but it also elaborated new liturgies consisting of prayer as well as the recitation and study of scripture.[80] Second Temple Judaism also developed a regimen of private worship unknown to pre-exilic Israel. Studying and meditating on the word of God are acts of worship.[81] The piety of pre-exilic Israel centred on the group, while the piety of second temple Judaism centred on both the group and the individual.[82] It seems that Qohelet is concerned more with individuals than groups. Pre-exilic Israel believed that God administered justice in this world. The righteous and the wicked were not always the direct recipients of God's attentions; but their offspring were. On the contrary, second temple Judaism insisted that God punishes or rewards only those who deserve it, and that the conduct of one's ancestors is irrelevant.[83] Qohelet seems to disagree with both viewpoints. He challenges both of them by asking "Who knows?". On one occasion Qohelet says, "I hated all my wealth for which I laboured under the sun for I must leave it to the man who will live after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will have control over all my wealth for which I laboured and for which I excercised my skill under the sun. This also is futility (2: 18-19)". On another occasion he says, "I have seen everything in my futile days; there is a righteous person who perishes in his righteousness, and there is wicked person who lives long in his wickedness (7: 15)". Qohelet probably presents a point of view which mediates the conflicting points of view, meaning that his own radical point of view is not compromised. The traditional understanding of wisdom is being modified by Hellenistic influences; Qohelet is clearly writing in a transitional period.

In order to compare Ecclesiastes and Thai Buddhism, it is not necessary to make a decision on the date of the book. Nonetheless, it helps to have some kind of working hypothesis for the circumstances which led Qohelet to write Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes indeed is one of the strangest books in the Bible. It is very difficult to interpret. However, its message is so powerful for it cuts through the hearts of men

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[78]Cohen (1987), 21.
[79]Cohen (1987), 22.
[80]Cohen (1987), 22.
[81]Cohen (1987), 22.
[82]Cohen (1987), 22.
[83]Cohen (1987), 22.

in the Hellenistic period and in modern times as well. Therefore when people read Ecclesiastes, they should read it with an open heart and mind. They are being invited by the author to share frustration, disappointment, dismay, confusion and doubt. This book allows them to pause and ask themselves what the real purpose of life is.

Chapter Two

Qohelet as a Wise Man

It is very difficult to know who Qohelet was. Most scholars agree that king Solomon was not the author of Ecclesiastes. The epilogue of the book identifies Qohelet as a *ḥakam*, a sage.[1] Compared with the priests and the prophets, we do not have a clear picture of the wise men or sages in the Old Testament. And we cannot give a detailed description of the social class of these wise men in Israel. The term "wise" is used widely in the Old Testament literature. A man can be called wise if he is versed in a particular skill - in the technique of fashioning metals (1 Kgs. 7:14), in goldsmith's work and wood-carving (Ex. 31:3), in spinning (Ex. 35:25)–or if he is a skilled seafarer (Ezek. 27:8; Ps. 107:27), or a statesman and soldier (Isa. 10:13). The general term "wise men" (Aramaic חַכִּימַיָּא Dan. 2:12-14) includes the "magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans" as well as "astrologers" (Aramaic גָּזְרִין; 2:27; 4:7–Aramaic 4:4; 5:7).[2]

We do not know exactly what educational system Israel had in the biblical period, because the Old Testament does not give details of educational patterns and institutions.[3] However, there must have been some kind of educational system in Israel. One probable element would have been education in the family (Deut. 8:5; Prov. 31:1). Upbringing was the task of both mother and father. In the first years of a child's life it was primarily the mother who undertook the upbringing. The small child was probably entrusted to her until its third year; she usually provided for it entirely (cf. 1 Sam. 1:21-28).[4] When the child grew older the father took more responsibility for disciplining the child. Normally the young man had to grow up to assume his father's profession. A boy's upbringing and his training for a profession lay in the same hands, whether he became a farmer and cattle-breeder, or craftsman, priest or judge (cf. Gen. 4:20-22; 1 Sam. 2:12ff; 8:1ff.).[5]

Another institution through which some Israelites probably received their education was the royal courts. It seems probable that court life in Jerusalem developed on the model of other royal courts in the ancient Near East.[6] Daniel and his companions

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[1]Crenshaw (1987), 190.
[2]Blank, S. H.,"Wisdom", *IDB* IV, 853.
[3]Rendtorff (1985), 109.
[4]Wolff (1974), 178.
[5]Wolff (1974), 179.
[6]Rendtorff (1985), 108.

were educated by the Chaldeans for three years before they could serve in the royal court of King Nebuchanezzar (Dan. 1:4-5). In Egypt, Moses and Aaron met the groups of "sorcerers" (מְכַשְּׁפִים) and the "magicians" (חַרְטֻם), who were summoned by Pharaoh to perform against them (Ex. 7:11). Prior to that we have the story of Joseph who could interpret the dreams of Pharaoh when all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men could not interpret them (Gen. 41:8). Furthermore, Joseph gave sound advice and, being recognised as superior in discretion and wisdom through the spirit of God, became great in the land, second only to Pharaoh (41:33-44).

These examples took place in foreign courts; in each contest with the wise men of the foreign court, the Hebrews triumph with the help of God. However, Hebrew wise men were not only present in the foreign courts, but in the Israelite court as well. These wise men were the advisers of the Israelite kings, mostly in the area of politics. The most famous counsellor in the Old Testament was Ahithophel who betrayed David and finally committed suicide because Absalom did not listen to his advice (2 Sam. 15:31-37; 16:20-17:23). Even though his counsel was regarded as the oracle of God (2 Sam. 16:23), David would not only listen to Ahithophel; he sought advice from other counsellors as well. One of them was his uncle Jonathan who was a man of understanding and a scribe (1 Ch. 27:32). Another one was Hushai the Archite who was able to counter the counsel of Ahithophel and thwart it (2 Sam. 17:5-14).

It was quite common to have a group of wise men in the Israelite royal court. Though King Solomon's wisdom was regarded as surpassing the wisdom of all the people of the east and of Egypt, he had a group of counsellors in his court (1 Kgs 12:6). Solomon was not only clever himself, he also knew how to use intelligent men to serve him. He was a great organiser and administrator. There are abundant references to officials who gave advice to the Israelite kings in the book of Kings and also in Isaiah and Jeremiah.[7] These officials have different titles: עֲבָדִים (servants),[8] סָרִיס (eunuch, princes, military officers),[9] סוֹפְרִים (scribes, secretaries),[10] and יוֹעֵץ (counsellor, king's adviser).[11] We do not know exactly whether this implied different roles in the Israelite court or not. They were probably individuals who had specific responsibility in the kingdom, and who were also selected by the Israelite kings to sit in the Council. From the variety of titles, it is very difficult to construct a precise definition of wise men or sages in the Israelite court.

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[7]Whybray (1974), 15.
[8]cf. 1 Sam. 16:17; 18:22; 28:7; 1 Kgs. 1:47; 2 Kgs. 22:12; 2 Ch. 34:20.
[9]cf. 1 Kgs. 22:9; 2 Kgs. 9:32; 25:19; Je. 52:25.
[10]cf. 2 Sam. 8:17; 20:25; 1 Ch. 18:16; 2 Kgs. 18:18,37; Is. 36:3,22.
[11]cf. 2 Sam. 15:12; 1 Ch. 27:33; Is. 19:11.

McKenzie identifies the wise men of Israel with scribes and historians, and designates the historical books as wisdom literature.[12] This identification of the wise men, however, does not help us much because it is too broad. These wise men have been identified by various scholars as priests, Deuteronomists, forerunners of the later scribes who were students of the Law of Moses, or expounders of the Law of which the scribes were the editors.[13] Many scholars believe that the adjective חָכָם is a technical term denoting a member of a distinct "professional" class.[14] However, Whybray would not agree with those scholars, because he thinks that the "relative frequency with which the word occurs in political contexts in Isaiah has misled earlier scholars into concluding that it had a technical meaning; but this theory would be tenable only if it occurred with this meaning in at least one administrative text or historical narrative. Such is not the case".[15] He points out that חָכָם "is in fact never used as the title of any person or as the designation of any group of persons in any narrative in the historical books or in Isaiah or Jeremiah which refers to the court or the administrative establishment".[16] He prefers to call this professional in the royal court סָרִיס (eunuch, princes, military officers).[17] It is true that חָכָם is occasionally used in a general sense so that to call a person wise was not necessarily to identify him as a sage (cf. Judge 5:29).[18] But to deny any specific meaning to the term "wise men" is unacceptable. Rather, the term may be used to cover the whole range of people who have special skills of knowledge. And Crenshaw points out that the "existence of a body of literature which reflects specific interests at variance with Yahwistic texts in general seems to argue strongly for a professional class of sages in Israel".[19] Moreover, the vast majority of biblical proverbs seem to have arisen in a context other than the royal court.[20] Smith also points out:

> All this material–Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Jonah, Judith, Tobit, Esther and the Song of Songs–is essentially belletristic and as such is sharply distinguished from the national legend and history, laws and prophecies, preserved by the earlier Yahweh-alone traditon. This belletristic material testifies to the continued existence from the sixth to the second century of a lay circle enjoying wealth, leisure, and considerable culture (and of lay scribes and teachers who copied this material and

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[12]McKenzie (1967), 2,8.
[13]Whybray (1974), 23.
[14]Whybray (1974), 6.
[15]Whybray (1974), 31.
[16]Whybray (1974), 17.
[17]Whybray (1974), 31.
[18]Crenshaw (1969), 133.
[19]Crenshaw (1982), 28.
[20]Crenshaw (1982), 56.

> perpetuated it as part of a humane literary education). This circle cared little for the old Israelite literature which had been preserved by the Yahweh-alone party.[21]

Ben Sira argues in Sirach 38:24-39:11, that the sages in Israel had more free time than other occupations, and therefore could afford to concentrate upon intellectual pursuits. Though the term Ben Sira uses is סוֹפֵר which usually means "scribe" instead of חָכָם, his scribe is not just a person who only rewrote texts of the holy scriptures. A scribe is a learned man; he devotes himself to study, to preserve, and to investigate all kinds of literature. He even travels to foreign countries to learn at first hand the good or evil of man's lot (Sirach 39:4). Because of his dedication, a scribe is able to pour forth wise sayings of his own. In the light of this evidence, it seems unlikely that there was no professional class of sages in Israel. It is also possible to identify the scribes with the wise men, because of the wide range of activities attributed to the scribes. Whybray uses Jer. 8:8-9 to argue that the scribes are distinct from the wise men by pointing out the change from the second to the third person.[22] He argues that if these two groups are identical we should expect Jeremiah to say, "Your false pen has made it into a lie".[23] Whybray's reasoning is weak because in verse 9, the wise men are also referred to by use of the third person. And if they are distinct, there must be a professional class of wise men. McKane, however, identifies the scribes with the wise men for he says "verses 8-9 are directed against the claim of the חכמים or ספרים to be official interpreters of the תורה".[24] Carroll thinks this passage is an attack on the written torah of the wise men.[25] In the Rabbinic text *Pirqê Aboth* these terms are used together. Rabbi Jose b. Kisma[26] was once asked by a man "Rabbi, from what place are thou?". He answered, "I come from a great city of sages and scribes [אֲנִי מֵעִיר גְּדוֹלָה שֶׁלַּחֲכָמִים וְשֶׁלְּסוֹפְרִים[27]]". After hearing this, the man offered the Rabbi, "If thou wilt dwell with us in our place I will give thee a thousand thousand golden denars and precious stones and pearls".[28] In the light of this Rabbinic text, the distinction between sages and scribes is not clear. However, both of them belonged to the same class of people who were highly respected by Jewish society, for the man did not ask the Rabbi, "Are you a sage or a scribe?". Instead, he offered him a big sum of money. One could infer from this text that sages and scribes had special occupations that could

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[21]Smith (1987), 121.
[22]Whybray (1974), 22.
[23]Whybray (1974), 22.
[24]McKane (1986), 185-186.
[25]Carroll (1986), 228-229.
[26]Lived between 120-140 C.E.
[27]Aboth 6:9
[28]Aboth 6:9

earn a lot of money. Similarly, pre 70 C.E. period sages and scribes were doing the same job in the early second century B.C.E. Saldarini states "In Ben Sira the understanding of scribe has been widened so that it is almost equivalent to that of the wise men".[29] Although Ben Sira probably does not presuppose a total identification of wise men and scribes, he certainly sees little difference in their capabilities and characteristices. In 39:1-3, Ben Sira describes a man who devotes himself to studying the law, all the wisdom of the past and the prophecies–normally the task of wise men. This same man also preserves the sayings of famous men which is the task of scribes.

1 Ch. 27:32 [וְיהוֹנָתָן דּוֹד־דָּוִיד יוֹעֵץ אִישׁ־מֵבִין וְסוֹפֵר הוּא וִיחִיאֵל בֶּן־חַכְמוֹנִי עִם־בְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ׃] may take us back even further. Note the name "חַכְמוֹנִי" next to סוֹפֵר. 1 Ch. 27:32-34 gives the list of David's advisors. In verse 32, two advisors are mentioned together. The first one is Jonathan who is described as David's uncle or David's beloved friend.[30] He is also described as a counsellor, a man of skill and a scribe. Compared with other persons in the list, his qualifications are described in more detail; he is probably not mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[31] Jehiel is also another unknown figure.[32] However, he is only described as the son of the Hachmonite. Curtis and Madsen observe that the word "חַכְמוֹנִי" meaning "wise" is particularly appropriate here, especially used in describing the tutor of the king's sons.[33] Compared with Jonathan's detailed description, the word "חַכְמוֹנִי" is enough to describe Jehiel. The word "חַכְמוֹנִי" is probably a family name, but it also refers to the occupation of the family. The word "חַכְמוֹנִי" is a denominative noun of the word חָכָם. Gesenius points out that nouns with the termination וֹנִי can express adjectival ideas (*GKC* § 86f, p.240). Therefore we may deduce that Jehiel himself is a wise man.[34] Since Jonathan a scribe and Jehiel a wise man are doing the same job as the teachers of the king's sons, we may conclude that there was no clear distinction of the role of the scribe and the wise man in the Old Testament period.

The other passage in Jeremiah that supports the existence of the wise men as a distinct class is Jer. 18:18, "Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall

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[29]Saldarini (1988), 256.

[30]Curtis and Madsen [(1910), 294] suggest that this Jonathan could be King Saul's son because they see no uncle of David by the name of Jonathan. For them, the word דוד is used most often as loved one (lover) which is equivalent to friend. Cf. Japhet [(1993), 479] who states "It is uncertain whether he should be identified with 'the son of Shimea, David's brother' who slew 'a man of great stature' (I Chron. 20.7//II Sam. 21.21), or with some other Jonathan of David's family, such as the brother of Jonadab, who is also described as a 'very wise (RSV crafty) man' (II Sam.13.3)".

[31]Braun [(1986), 263] suggests that it seems preferable to consider this Jonathan as an other wise unknown uncle of David, or, more loosely construed, "friend" or "relative" of David's.

[32]Braun (1986), 263.

[33]Curtis and Madsen (1910), 295.

[34]The meaning of בן is not necessarily "son" in a literal sense. Cf. Prov. 10:1; 28:7,11.

not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not heed any of his words". Whybray does not agree with most scholars that this passage is a reference to three professional classes who form the mainstay of the Judean state; he thinks it is simply a contemptuous reference to three kinds of people whose common characteristic is that they are forever talking, but whose talk is valueless.[35] Whybray's argument is not convincing since the priests and the prophets are clearly professional classes. From the context, it seems to make more sense to take the wise men as a professional class whose speech is acceptable to the public because of their status. Also Ezekiel threatened that "Disaster comes upon disaster... they seek a vision from the prophet, but the law perishes from the priest, and counsel from the elders" (Ezek. 7:26). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel pointed to a defined group or caste, which one called the "wise" and the other called the "elders". They knew of a group distinguished from priests and from prophets, a group whose function was to provide "counsel". Ezekiel's elders are surely to be equated with Jeremiah's wise men; their social role is the same.[36]

Sirach 39:1, "How different it is with the man who devotes himself to studying the law of the Most High, who investigates all the wisdom of the past, and spends his time studying the prophecies!", seems to suggests that there were at least three main types of literature in Israel: the law, the wisdom writings, and the prophecies. The law is related to the priests and the prophecies are related to the prophets; thus the wisdom writings are probably related to the wise men.

The Book of Proverbs is an example of the collections of sayings of wise men– with names (1:1; 10:1; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1), and without names (22:17; 24:33). Prov.25:1 seems to suggest that king Hezekiah, who reigned between 715-687 B.C.E., took an active interest in the welfare of the wisdom tradition, as had Solomon before him. This evidence also suggests that the writings of the wise men are older than 715 B.C.E., and thus a professional class of the wise men was even older. It is not clear how these sayings were passed on. However, a kind of educational system must have existed in order to preserve these sayings. Moreover, it is likely that there were schools in Israel for training sages. 2 Kgs. 6:1 suggests that there was a school or community for prophets under the guidance of Elisha the prophet. Therefore it is possible that the wise men had their own school as well. We may not have any evidence of school buildings from the Old Testament period, but we have later evidence in Sirach 51:23 where Jesus Ben Sira invites those who need instruction to come to his school or house of learning

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[35]Whybray (1974), 31.

[36]Blank, S. H., "Wisdom", *IDB* IV , 855.

[בית מִדְרָשׁ][37]. There is a charge or a fee for learning as Jesus Ben Sira says "Your share of instruction may cost you a large sum of silver, but it will bring you a large return in gold" (Sirach 51:28). Learning is a source of investment, therefore it is not limited to those who work in the political offices. Those who want to work in the trading business need special training as well.

Other evidence for the existence of wisdom schools or institutions in the Old Testament period can be found in the relationship between teachers and disciples. Isaiah commands "seal the teaching among my disciples" (Is. 8:16). A teacher in the Book of Proverbs warns his disciples that they should keep his instructions, lest at the end of their life they will say "How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors." (Prov.5: 13). There were various kinds of training in Israel, among them training to be soldiers (S. of S. 3:8), singers (1 Ch. 25:7) and prophets (1 Kgs. 20:35; 2 Kgs. 2:3, 5, 7; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1). The prophet's disciples are called the "sons of the prophets". These sons of the prophets were placed at specific locations including Bethel (2 Kgs. 2:3), Jerico (2 Kgs. 2:5) and the Jordan (2 Kgs. 6:1-2). These locations might have had school buildings where they could learn as a group. The prominent prophet might occassionally visit them to give his instruction.

Other evidence that supports the existence of a professional class of wise men in the Old Testament period is the continuity of the sages in the Rabbinic period. Jose b. Joezer[38] of Zeredah said, "Let thy house be a meeting-house for the sages [יְהִי בֵיתְךָ בֵּית וַעַד לַחֲכָמִים] and sit amid the dust of their feet and drink in their words with thirst" (Aboth 1:4). From this evidence, it is possible to conclude that people in the past invited sages to teach them in their houses, or they might go to the House of Study as R. Eleazar ha-Kappar[39] said:

> There are four types among them that frequent the House of Study [בית הַמִּדְרָשׁ]: he that goes and does not practise–he has the reward of his going; he that practises but does not go–he has the reward of his practising; he that goes and also practises-he is a saintly man; he that neither goes nor practises–he is a wicked man.
> There are four types among them that sit in the presence of the Sages [חֲכָמִים]: the sponge, the funnel, the strainer, and the sifter. 'The sponge'-which soaks up everything; 'the funnel'–which takes in at this end and lets out at the other; 'the strainer'–which lets out the wine and collects the lees; 'the sifter'–which extracts the coarsely-ground flour and collects the fine flour.
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> Aboth 5:14-15.

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[37]See also Aboth 5:14

[38]c. 160 B.C.E.

[39]c. 165-200 C.E.

It is obvious that the House of Study was open to all kinds of people. There were no limitations on certain groups of people to receive education. There were many kinds of people who became students of the sages. Each of them had a different ability to learn and to retain knowledge. The metaphors above describe four types of students which demonstrated different quality of learning. It seems likely that the students were the ones who assumed responsibilities for their education and conduct. The sages would not force their students to do everything they taught. However, the teachings of the sages survive, because there were groups of disciples who learned in order to teach, as R. Ishmael[40] said, "He that learns in order to teach is granted the means to learn and to teach [הַלּוֹמֵד עַל מְנָת לְלַמֵּד, מַסְפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לִלְמוֹד וּלְלַמֵּד]; but he that learns in order to perform is granted the means to learn and to teach, to observe and to perform." (Aboth 4:5). From this evidence, we can see that there might have been special funds provided for the disciples who were going to preserve their masters' teachings. This big amount of money may have arisen from the community to support the learned men. Also the wealthy fathers would have liked their daugthers to marry the sages. It seems that the sages had many good opportunities to become wealthy. Ecclesiastes might have been preserved by Qohelet's disciples who defended Qohelet's teachings by saying that Qohelet "taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care" (Eccl.12:9).

It seems possible that the wise men were from the upper-class of society, since they had free time and the means to concentrate upon intellectual pursuits. Smith illustrates the social divisions most important in Judea during Nehemiah's time from his memoirs and from the list of wall builders in Neh. 3. These divisions were Persian governor (Nehemiah himself), Nehemiah's staff (including the commander of the citadel and the soldiers of the garrison) and Nehemiah's family.[41] After the governor, the leading group is probably the priests, whose head is the high priest, who had a palace near the city wall (3:21). Other religious figures are the Levites (attached to the temple, but inferior to the priests), and the lower ranking groups of temple personnel, prophets (6:7,12,14), and a scribe (13:13).[42] The laity in Nehemiah's time was composed of the landed gentry (חֹרִים), the civil officials (סְגָנִים), "the Judaeans" (possibly the heads of the families, regardless of wealth), and "the rest of the people".[43] The sages may have belonged to the landed gentry or at least may have got their support from them. And it is most likely that the sages were the "client class" of

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[40]A son of R. Johanan b. Baroka who was a disciple of R. Joshua.
[41]Smith (1987), 115.
[42]Smith (1987), 115-116.
[43]Smith (1987), 116. Cf. Neh. 5:7.

the wealthy. The wealthy owners of estates possessed sufficient capital to enable them to support the sages to work for them. And the autobiographical section of Qohelet (Eccl. 2:1-11) seems to suggest that if he was not King Solomon, he should be one of the landed gentry, or at least had experienced the luxurious life of the landed gentry. Crenshaw points out that the sages did not want anyone to rock the boat, because they were powerless–controlled by the wealthy–and they themselves recognised the usefulness of bribes, obsequiousness, and general "yesmanship". Accordingly, they encouraged any means that would mollify anger, and they refused to become involved in efforts at social reform.[44] The sages placed considerable emphasis upon moderation. This emphasis is similar to the concept of the middle way in Buddhism. This concept is very popular in Thailand, because it has been often used to overcome major political crises in the country. For example Thailand was the only country in South-East Asia that was not colonized by the British Empire or the French. During World War II, the Thai government was forced to join the Japanese, but the Thai Ambassador in the United States declared that the announcement of the government was illegal. Therefore the group of Thais who lived abroad fought against the Japanese. Then after the war Thailand was free from international reprisals.

As a sage, Qohelet also recommends moderation and advises caution while any person is standing in front of a king, because a king's word has authority (Eccl. 8:4). But Qohelet seems to be different from other sages for he is able to criticise a king. He criticises "there is a time when a man rules over another man to hurt him" (Eccl. 8:9). He states that "it is better to be a poor youth and wise than an old king and fool who does not know how to take warning anymore" (Eccl.4:13). It seems that Qohelet sides with the poor, but he really does not describe the situation or the hardship of the poor. Although he talks about injustice, he does not encourage political change. Instead, he advises "if you see the oppression of the poor, and justice and right taken away in a province, do not be astounded over the matter, because every official is watched by the one higher, and there are yet higher ones over them" (Eccl. 5:7). The lack of compassion toward the poor seems to suggest that Qohelet himself belonged to the aristocracy. He does not speak for the poor, instead he thinks the poor are better than the rich for he says "Sweet is the sleep of the worker, whether he eats little or much; but the plentiful food of the rich does not permit him to sleep" (Eccl. 5:12). He uses the examples about the poor only to emphasise the futility of life of the rich who do not know how to enjoy life.

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[44]Crenshaw (1982), 20.

Though Qohelet inherited the traditional role of "wise man", he was a great independent thinker who created a book to share his experiences and ideas that were different from those of other wise men in the past. Qohelet was born into an age of enlightenment. This age was ushered in by a startling declaration of Aristotle, made when Alexander was conquering the East, that we ought not to follow those who say that men should have thoughts which befit mortals.[45] The sages in Jerusalem were confronted with Greek ideas, and they had to work with new ways of thinking. It was not easy to handle these approaches safely, but it was also impossible to ignore them. Therefore Qohelet had to modify the Israelite wisdom tradition and fashion new methods as well as new ideas.

Bickerman directs us to see several new things invented by Qohelet:

> For the first time in Jewish sapiential literature, so far as is known (except for Prov. 24:32), the Sage gives precedence to his "I." The first person of the verb is not sufficient. He adds the pronoun ani, though it is emphatic or pleonastic. For the first time in Hebrew writings the term *darash* is used by Koheleth (1:3) in the sense of investigating a problem - a meaning which was later to become common in the rabbinic schools. Again and again Koheleth stresses his personal experience of life. For the first time in Jerusalem, as far as we know, a man seeks to find out the secret of God's causing what happens under the sun (8:17).[46]

Though Qohelet is free in using his own stylistic features to convey his thought concerning traditional wisdom issues, he uses forms which are predominantly from the wisdom tradition and he does not depart from it. The form and content are often merely reused in a new context which leads to a change in meaning.[47] In light of the evidence mentioned above we should see Qohelet as a reformer rather than as a radical or protestor as suggested by some scholars.[48]

So, it is quite difficult to construct a narrow definition of wise men in the Old Testament period; but from all the evidence we have, we can conclude that there was a professional class of sages in Israel. Surely, Qohelet was one of them and spent most of his time learning and teaching. And his work was carefully preserved by his

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[45]Bickerman (1967), 153. Aristotle teaches that man is a material substance and thus is part of nature. This means that, like other natural entities, man is composed of an underlying matter from which the human body has emerged and a soul which gives form and structure to the body. Both body and soul are essential to man. [Feinberg, P.D., "Aristotle, Aristotelianism", *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 77.] But when he adds that, while soul is actuality of body, body is not actuality of soul, the definition becomes a declaration of soul's supremacy. [Jackson, H., "Aristotle, Aristotelianism", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 1, 789.]

[46]Bickerman (1967), 154.

[47]Dell (1991), 143.

[48]Dell (1991), 147; Smith [(1987), 123] thinks Qohelet was "the sceptic [who] turns out to be the defender of (conformity to) the faith".

disciples who passed on his teachings to other generations. Both the sages and their writings were prominent in Israel, and the people looked to them for guidance.

Chapter Three

Reconstruction of the Audiences[1] of Ecclesiastes

Most scholars agree that the contradictions in Ecclesiastes make it difficult to interpret. Ogden suggests that wisdom literature tends to contain a number of apparently contradictory sayings, because the advice given in wisdom literature is governed by the situation.[2] Therefore it would be possible to understand Qohelet's contradictions if we knew the situation for which he gives advice. Gammie comments:

> Even though the exegete may fall into erroneous expositions (should his or her assessment of date or background subsequently be proven to be wrong), the worse error would be to attempt to interpret with little or no reference to the relation of the biblical author to his or her own cultural environment.[3]

Qohelet, the author of Ecclesisates, definitely gave advice with various circumstances in mind. He uses many different kinds of people as examples in giving his advice. Qohelet mentions the wicked and the righteous, the old king and the poor youth, the rich and the poor. Also we have to find out to whom Qohelet gives this advice in order to find out what their situation is.

It seems possible that there are two audiences whom Qohelet was addressing. Bickerman initially suggests that Qohelet was addressing a crowd on the street. Qohelet was not unique in this regard, because there were several Greek philosophers (E.g. Crates, Menippus, or Bion) who did the same thing. In order to attract attention from the crowd, these philosophers had to shout. In order to help the crowd to remember their teachings they uttered maxims which sounded like paradoxes.[4] Further on, Bickerman writes that Qohelet addressed affluent hearers, urging them not to share wealth with others, but to use it for their own enjoyment.[5] Bickerman may have forgotten what he had said at the beginning of his book and jumped to this conclusion. This may be an example of scholarly error or a suggestion that Qohelet addressed at least two groups of people. Garrett thinks Qohelet did not directly address the lower classes, but spoke to those who had dealings with the king.[6] However, Fredericks shows that there are at least 17 characteristics of the vernacular in the book; however,

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[1]I use this word in the plural form to emphasise the fact that Qohelet intentionally wrote for a number of different audiences.
[2]Ogden (1987), 10-11.
[3]Gammie (1985), 173.
[4]Bickerman (1967), 143-144.
[5]Bickerman (1967), 165.
[6]Garrett (1987), 177.

he does not take up the distinction between the vernacular and scholarly language.[7] This evidence seems to suggest that his audiences included common people and that the thought of Qohelet was conveyed in an oral form. Moreover, Segal points out that the author of Ecclesiastes, as well as the authors of Chronicles, Esther, Daniel, Sirach, and the Psalms of Solomon did not use Biblical Hebrew in their ordinary everyday life.[8] Segal also suggests:

> BH [Biblical Hebrew] was to them only a literary and artificial medium of expression which they had acquired in the school from the study of the old sacred literature. That is why they sometimes show awkwardness in handling the old Hebrew idiom, and difficulty in expressing their thoughts with clearness and exactness. That is also why they often lapse into usages and expressions which remind us of MH [Mishnaic Hebrew] or of Aram.[Aramaic] What language did the authors of those late BH books speak in their daily life? Or, in other words, what was the language of ordinary life of educated native Jews in Jerusalem and Judea in the period from 400 B.C.E. to 150 C.E.? The evidence presented by MH and its literature leaves no doubt that that language was MH. Of course, those educated Judeans also understood Aram., and used it even in writing, but only occasionally, and not habitually.[9]

Segal's suggestion seems to be correct, for the Masoretes apparently understood the language of Ecclesiastes better than the Aramaic in Daniel. Comparing the number of instances of Qere/Ketiv in Daniel with the number in Ecclesiastes, we will notice that there are many more in Daniel.[10] Qohelet seems to write in the vernacular language, probably Mishnaic Hebrew, which was still known by the Jews of a later period. Therefore Ecclesiastes does not need linguistic updating as much as the Aramaic section of Daniel. The general public of his time would have understood his message because Qohelet used their language.

Dahood agrees that Ecclesiastes was written in Hebrew, but he also suggests that the author of Ecclesiastes employed Phoenician orthography[11], because his composition shows heavy Canaanite-Phoenician literary influence.[12] He explains that the Phoenician hypothesis does not deny that Qohelet's style shows marked similarities to Mishnaic Hebrew, for Phoenician also shares a number of syntactical and lexical parallelisms with Mishnaic Hebrew which were not found in Biblical Hebrew.[13] Kutscher agrees with Dahood for he points out that Ecclesiastes shares some traits with

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[7]Fredericks (1988), 256-257. The scholarly language probably means Biblical Hebrew as a literary language in Qohelet's time (p.44).

[8]Segal (1958), 13.

[9]Segal (1958), 13.

[10]The concentration of Qere/Ketiv in Daniel are in chapters 2-5 which were written in Aramaic. Most occurrences of Qere/Ketiv in Daniel are updating Biblical Aramaic to Jewish Palestinian Aramaic. It seems possible that the Aramaic section in Daniel is older than Ecclesiastes.

[11]The way words are spelled, for example, the omitting of the י or the ה in some words.

[12]Dahood (1952), 32.

[13]Dahood (1952), 33.

Canaanite and even Ugaritic which are generally absent from Aramaic and Late Biblical Hebrew in general.[14] But Kutscher only cites one example from Ecclesiastes, found in 4:2 וְשַׁבַּח אֲנִי. This construction, namely the infinitive with the independent pronoun, was uncommon in Hebrew, and it did not survive in Mishnaic Hebrew.[15] In a Canaanite inscription of Azitawada (9th century B.C.E.) this construction was found several times.[16] Dahood reckons that the only other Biblical parallel, that an infinitive absolute followed by a personal pronoun, is in Esther 9:1.[17] Dahood gives another example of the infinitive absolute immediately followed by the personal pronoun in Eccl. 9:15 וַיְמַלֵּט־הוּא אֶת־הָעִיר.[18] But Gordis calls attention to the existence of the infinitive absolute with a subject in earlier Biblical texts, such as Lev. 6:7 הַקְרֵב אֹתָהּ בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן and Deut. 15:2 שָׁמוֹט כָּל בַּעַל מַשֵּׁה יָדוֹ.[19] Whitley suggests that the pointing שַׁבַּח may be that of the infinitive absolute or infinitive construct.[20] He cites the example of infinitive absolute from Deut. 22:7 שַׁלֵּחַ תְּשַׁלַּח, and infinitive construct from Exodus 7:27 לְשַׁלֵּחַ.[21] Further, the Qumran literature contains several examples of an infinitive with pronominal subject, as in the Manual of Discipline 7:16: ואיש ברבים ילך רכיל לשלח הוא מאתם ולוא ישוב עוד , and the Damascus Scroll 9:1: בחוקי הגוים להמית הוא.[22] Thus the construction of an infinitive followed by a personal pronoun could be used in Hebrew. Therefore, the theory that Qohelet was influenced by Phoenician is not quite convincing. Qohelet probably uses this construction because it was the way people in Israel spoke.

The other evidence that Dahood uses as an example of the influence of Canaanite is the relative pronoun שׁ.[23] Many scholars believe the relative pronoun שׁ represents northern usage as opposed to אֲשֶׁר in the southern dialect.[24] In Biblical Hebrew שׁ occurs twice in the Song of Deborah (שַׁקַּמְתִּי), a North Israelite production; three times in the story of Gideon, a North Israelite hero, and once in the North Israelite section of the Book of Kings. All instances of the relative pronoun in Canticles, except

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[14]Kutscher (1982), 85.
[15]Kutscher (1982), 85.
[16]Kutscher (1982), 85.
[17]Dahood (1952), 49.
[18]Dahood (1952), 50.
[19]Gordis (1960), 399.
[20]Whitley (1979), 40.
[21]Whitley (1979), 40.
[22]Gordis (1960), 399. Whitley (1979), 41.
[23]Dahood (1952), 45.
[24]Kutscher (1982), 70; Driver (1913), 449; Segal (1958), 43; Waltke & O'Connor (1990), 332; Gesenius-Kautzsch, §36.

the title of the book, involve שׁ. In Ecclesiastes שׁ is used 68 times and אֲשֶׁר 89 times.[25] שׁ is used only once in Ezra, twice in Chronicles, and not used in Esther at all. Segal suggests that the scarcity of שׁ in the North Israelite documents of the Bible must be explained by the assumption that it was regarded as a vulgarism which an author using literary language would avoid.[26] However, its use gradually extended to Southern Palestine, and it must in the course of time have entirely supplanted the longer אֲשֶׁר in the language of the common people.[27]

From the evidence that Qohelet uses both אֲשֶׁר and שׁ in Ecclesiastes, Dahood believes that "Qoheleth was a Jew who wrote his work in Hebrew but who was more familiar with the Phoenician language and consequently betrayed all types of Phoenicianisms in his morphology and style".[28] But Segal explains this evidence as the remaining literary prejudice against שׁ even after Biblical Hebrew had ceased to be a living language.[29] The suggestions from Dahood and Segal do not give satisfactory answers to the almost equal occurances of אֲשֶׁר and שׁ in Ecclesiastes. It seems possible that both אֲשֶׁר and שׁ were still commonly used in Qohelet's time.

Dahood supposes that Qohelet was a resident of a Phoenician city, when he recalls that after the devastation of Jerusalem and Southern Judah in 587 B.C., the centre of Jewish culture shifted north to Galilee, which was not devastated by the Chaldaeans; a large number of Jews moved to the North.[30] But in Ecclesiastes, Jerusalem is mentioned instead of a Phoenician city. Also אֲשֶׁר occurs more often than שׁ, thus implying that the southern dialect may have been dominant in Jerusalem. And probably Qohelet would have lived in the period when there was a transition from Biblical Hebrew to Mishnaic Hebrew. Moreover, in Qohelet's time, Jerusalem was probably composed of all kinds of people from different parts of Palestine, so the southern and northern dialect may have been used side by side. Qohelet did not limit his writing for audiences of one particular type. Tcherikover comments about Jerusalem as follows:

> Although Nehemiah spoke of Jerusalem as a "wide and large city," and deplored its small population [Nehemiah] (7.4), Hecataeus found it well populated (cf. above, p. 119). From this we may conclude that the city developed very rapidly at the end of the Persian period till, at the commencement of the Hellenistic epoch, it was both large and important. Without considering those classes which dwelt there and were simultaneously bound up with their country estates (the secular aristocracy and part

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[25]Both שׁ and אֲשֶׁר are very often conjuctions.
[26]Segal (1958), 43.
[27]Segal (1958), 43.
[28]Dahood (1952), 45.
[29]Segal (1958), 43.
[30]Dahood (1952), 34.

> of the priestly class), the original city populace was composed of craftsmen, merchants and people concerned in finance, such as tax-collectors, moneylenders and the like. Of these three classes, only the first could be regarded as old, established in the town since the time of the return from exile. Nehemiah himself refers to the craftsmen of various kinds organized in their craft-guilds: metal-workers, herbalists, peddlers, bakers and "medicine men" (physicians), and several other types of craftsmen should no doubt be added. As in every ancient city, the craftsmen of Jerusalem constituted the chief part of the urban "proletariat" that earned its living by diligent and hard work, but also alert, nervous and quick to blaze up, and hence the first in line to take part in any political disturbance or social revolution, whereas the rural population, sluggish in thought and deed, was much less prone to swift and hasty action. The merchant class, for its part, developed slowly and had but shallow roots in Jewish history in Palestine.[31]

It seems clear that the wealth of Jerusalem had drawn many people who would have come from other areas to share in its prosperity.

Several different passages in Ecclesiastes seem to be addressed to the craftsmen of Jerusalem, for this group of people needed to work hard to gain wealth. The provocative question, "What profit is it to a man from all his labour, which he does under the sun? (Eccl.1:3)", would be appropriate for the craftsmen.[32] In Eccl. 4:4, כִּשָּׁרוֹן and עָמָל (toil) were both objects of the verb רָאִיתִי . The noun כִּשָּׁרוֹן (skill, advantage or profit) occurs only in Ecclesiastes (2:21; 4:4; 5:10), but the verbal root occurs in Eccl. 10:10; 11:6; and Esth. 8:5. A similar word from Ugarit (*ktr, ktrt*) means "skill, expert" at a craft.[33] Gordis observes that this word may relate to the Canaanite deity of crafts, Kothar.[34] Since these two words are used side by side, it seems to imply that a person who wants to be successful in his work must be skillful and must work hard as well. In Eccl.10:10, Qohelet suggests that skill will bring success. The other common words that Qohelet uses to describe the situation of the craftsmen are יָד and כַּף (both mean hand). For example: הַכְּסִיל חֹבֵק אֶת־יָדָיו וְאֹכֵל אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ: [The fool embraces his hands and destroys his flesh.][35], טוֹב מְלֹא כַף נָחַת מִמְּלֹא חָפְנַיִם עָמָל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ: [It is better to have one hand full in peace than two hands full in toil and chasing after the wind.].[36] Did Qohelet speak to the craftsmen only? The messages in Ecclesiastes apparently would have addressed other groups of people as well.

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[31]Tcherikover (1970), 123.

[32]See also Eccl. 2:22; 3:9; 5:15.

[33]Crenshaw (1987), 88.

[34]Gordis (1955), 240.

[35]Eccl. 4:5.

[36]Eccl. 4:6. See also 9:10, where Qohelet advises "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might,...".

Another intended audience would have been the merchants. As Dahood points out, there are many commercial terms in the book of Ecclesiastes.[37] He gives the following comprehensive list:

עמל	(12) gain, earning	מסכן	(2) poor man
יתרון	(18) gain, advantage	מעט	(5) few
ענין	(6) occupation, business	הרבה	(27) much
יסף	(5) add, collect	המון	(1) mass of wealth
חסרון	(6) lack, deficit	תבואה	(1) produce, profit
מספר	(4) small number	בעל	(4) owner
קנה	(2) acquire	רעה	(1) loss, harm
כנס	(2) gather treasures	נכסים	(2) riches, goods
כסף	(4) silver, money	נחלה	(1) inheritance
זהב	(2) gold	חשבון	(5) computation
סגלה	(1) riches, wealth	שכר	(2) wages
חלק	(7) share, portion	שמן רוקח	(1) perfumer's oil
כשרון	(5) success, advantage	שלח לחמך	(1) cast your bread
אסף	(1) gather		(wealth)
עשר	(12) riches	אזן	(1) weigh

The number in parentheses indicates the number of times that the word or root is found.[38]

This list would be more helpful if Dahood had worked out and explained the meanings of some words in the context of Ecclesiastes. The root עמל can mean either "toil" or "wealth", depending on the context; it does not mean "gain" or "earning" every time. Dahood does not give examples for the passages where he thinks this root can mean "gain" or "earning". The root רעה occurs about 13 times in the book, and it has various meanings. But Dahood gives only one meaning here and he does not give us the reference of the passage where this root has the meaning "loss" or "harm". However, this list can help us to imagine that some of his audiences were merchants or persons who were involved in business. Bickerman observes that "Hurry up" is the refrain of the correspondence of Zenon, a business agent in the time of Qohelet.[39] Bickerman, then gives an example similar to a case in Ecclesiastes (2:23): "In the Athens of the fifth century, the debtor suffered from sleepless nights. In Hellenistic Athens it was the rich man who could not sleep for worry about his business affairs".[40]

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[37]Dahood (1952), 220-221.
[38]Dahood (1952), 221.
[39]Bickerman (1967), 159.
[40]Bickerman (1967), 159.

Political topics serve as additional evidence to help us determine the audiences of Ecclesiastes. Garrett points out that "while wisdom's many roots include the marketplace and ordinary world of folk wisdom, a primary *Sitz im Leben* of wisdom was the royal court".[41] He observes that there are eight separate passages in Ecclesiastes where Qohelet examines the use of political power.[42] From these passages, Garrett thinks that Qohelet addressed those with access to the royal court, or the circles of political power.[43]

It is not certain whether there was a royal court in Jerusalem in Qohelet's time. However, if Ecclesiastes was written in the Persian period, the kings mentioned in the book could have been the Persian governor of the province of *Yehud*, the Aramaic form of Judah. Although there is no clear evidence that Zerubbabel was ever declared king; both Haggai and Zechariah give him an elevated status with royal overtones.[44] It is possible that Judah was given the status of an independent province in the Persian period.[45] The confirmation of this status can be seen from the evidence of coins and jar handles which have been found in large numbers and which bear the names *yhd*, "Judah", or *yrslm*, "Jerusalem", and indeed even "Judah–the governor".[46] Therefore the governors of Judah could have had power to rule in Jerusalem like kings. And Qohelet's audiences could have been the officers who worked for the governors. As Hoglund points out other evidence includes commercial contact with the larger world:

> A second imperial mechanism at work in the Judaean community in the postexilic period was an increasingly commercialized economic environment; that is, exchange relationships were established involving long-distance transport of goods. While the presence of foreign merchants in Yehud receives brief notice in the biblical narratives (Tyrian fishmongers in Neh. 13.16), there is ample achaeological evidence to point toward extensive and protracted exchange relationships with the larger Mediterranean world.
>
> A primary form of evidence is the presence of imported ceramics, mainly of Athenian manufacture, that appear at virtually every excavated site in Yehud. Places as diverse as Bethel, En-Gedi, and Beth-Gubrin of the fifth century B.C.E. In contrast to ruralization that seemed to be targeted at Yehud, commercialization was widespread throughout the Levant, as evidenced by the quality and quantity of imported Aegean ceramics at a number of sites.[47]

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[41]Garrett (1987), 159.
[42]Garrett (1987), 159. Eccl. 3:15c-17; 4:1-3; 4:13-16; 5:7-8; 7:6-9; 8:1-8; 8:9-9:6; 9:13-10:20.
[43]Garrett (1987), 177.
[44]Grabbe (1992), 74-75. Cf. Hag. 2:20-23, and Zech. 4:6-10.
[45]Herrmann (1981), 326.
[46]Aharoni (1961), 98-118.
[47]Hoglund (1991), 60.

The ability of the Judaean community in the Persian period to be involved in international trade suggests that Judah was stable and this commercial activity was a dominant element of its economic life.

If Ecclesiastes was written in the later post-exilic period,[48] it would have been unlikely to have found a royal court in Jerusalem. In the Hellenistic period, the city was controlled by the military. After Alexander's death in 323 B.C.E., his general, Ptolemy, conquered Egypt and Palestine. His descendants held it until 198 B.C.E. In the Ptolemaic period Jerusalem was captured ten or twelve times, and was often occupied for considerable periods by Greek garrisons.[49] Therefore when Qohelet mentions kings, he could have been referring to the Ptolemies who ruled from Egypt and sent their agents to Palestine. The Ptolemies also had agents to look after the economic aspects of their empire. For example Zeno, an agent of Apollonius (the finance minister of Ptolemy II), visited several cities and towns in Palestine during 259-258 B.C.E.[50] In these cities and towns he had agents who represented the government (and not the private interests of Apollonius and Zeno).[51] When Qohelet gave advice to the politicians, he may have meant these agents.

In addition, the term מֶלֶךְ could have meant "ruler" or "leader" in a later period.[52] Ben Sira uses this term together with judge (שׁוֹפֵט), princes (שָׂרִיהָ), and sovereign (רֹאשׁ) in Sir 10:2-3:

מֶלֶךְ פָּרוּעַ יַשְׁחִית עִיר וְעִיר נוֹשֶׁבֶת בְּשֶׁבֶל שָׂרֶיהָ
כְּשׁוֹפֵט עַם כֵּן מְלִיצָיו וּכְרֹאשׁ עִיר כֵּן יוֹשְׁבָיו

The high priest Simon son of Onias II is much admired by Ben Sira, for he proudly describes Simon's building operations on the temple and defences of Jerusalem (50:1-4); normally carried out by the local governor. The high priest at this time probably had some political power, enjoying a royal status.

Further, from information preserved in the papyri, we find that a local native prince, Tobiah, was the head of the cleruchy. He was a wealthy "Sheikh" known

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[48]Whybray (1989), 11.

[49]Smith (1987), 47.

[50]Smith (1987), 50-51.

[51]Tcherikover suggests that these agents did not belong to the regular government officialdom, but acted as special emissaries of Apollonius and called themselves "the people of Apollonius the Dioiketes." [(1970), 62-63.] From one of the Zenon papyri, we can judge that there were quite a mumber of government officials in Palestine [Tcherikover, 62.]. Smith (1987), 51.

[52]Dell [(1994), 326.] provides an alternative meaning of מלך as "property owner" rather than "king".

throughout the region.[53] This Tobiah was the father of Joseph son of Tobiah, the famous tax-gatherer, who played such an important role in Jewish society in the third century.[54] This Joseph is mentioned by Josephus who tells the story in detail:

> Now there was a cetain Joseph, who was still a young man but because of his dignity and foresight had a reputation for uprightness among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, his father being Tobias, and his mother a sister of the high priest Onias; and, when his mother informed him of the envoy's arrival–for he himself happened to be away in the village of Phichola, from which he had originally come–, he went to the city (of Jerusalem) and upbraided Onias for not regarding the safety of his fellow-citizens and for being willing, instead, to place the nation in danger by withholding the money on account of which, Joseph said, he had received the chief magistracy and had obtained the high-priestly office... And, when Onias gave his permission, Joseph went up to the temple and, calling the people together in assembly, exhorted them not to be distrubed or frightened because of his uncle Onias' neglect of them, and begged them rather to keep their minds free of fear and dark forebodings; for he promised that he himself would go as an envoy to the king and persuade him that they were not doing any wrong...
>
> Now when the day came round on which the rights to farm taxes in the cities were to be sold, bids were made by those eminent in rank in the various provinces. When the sum of taxes from Coele-Syria and from Phoenicia and Judaea with Samaria added up to eight thousand talents, Joseph came forward and accused the bidders of having made an agreement to offer the king a low price for the taxes, whereas he for his part promised to give double that amount and send over to the king the property of those who had been remiss toward his house, for this right was sold along with that of farming the taxes. Thereupon the king, who heard him gladly, said that he would confirm the sale of the tax-farming rights to him, as he was likely to increase his revenue, but asked whether he also had some persons to give surety for him; he then answered very cleverly, "Yes, I will offer persons of the very best character, whom you will not distrust." And when the king asked him to tell who they were, he replied, "I offer you, O king, you yourself and your wife as the persons who will give surety for me, each to guarantee the other's share." At this Ptolemy laughed and granted him the tax-farming rights without guarantors...
>
> This good fortune he enjoyed for twenty-two years,...
>
> *Jewish Antiquities,* XII. 160-186.

Qohelet's audiences could well have included those who worked for Joseph son of Tobiah.

Smith suggests that Qohelet belonged to the upper class tradition.[55] Therefore some of his audiences were among the upper class. He also thinks that the writing was probably an answer to Job, for it ridiculed the human pretension to speculate on the nature of God and the problem of evil.[56] He does point out that the literature produced by Judaean aristocracy kept in touch with the intellectual and artistic developments of the Hellenistic world. But at the same time it came to terms with the law of the

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[53]Tcherikover (1970), 64.
[54]Tcherikover (1970), 65.
[55]Smith (1987), 121.
[56]Smith (1987), 121.

Jerusalem priesthood and the beliefs and practices of the Judaean populace.[57] Therefore Smith comments:

> The author of Ecclesiastes has reconciled himself not only to the inadequacy of human reason but also–thereby–to a popular piety which is an important element in his world (though he never discusses it directly) and which he practises though he does not believe. This is the typical adjustment of Hellenistic philosophers to the cults of the city-states.58

Smith's comment is quite inappropriate, for Qohelet did not conform to the Hellenistic culture, a proof of which is that he remains anonymous rather than giving his real name as author of the book (a Greek practice) (contrast Ben Sira).[59] And he does challenge several traditional ideas. However, Smith's comment points to the diversity of Qohelet's audiences. His audiences would be those who held to the old and traditional ways of thinking, as well as those who adopted the newly fashionable Greek ideas.[60]

Toward the end of his book, Qohelet clearly addresses the youth (11:9). These youth probably were his disciples or his followers who lived in this competitive and divided society. They were probably confused and looked for guidance.

From all the evidence mentioned above, it is clear that we should not limit Qohelet's audiences to one particular group of people. Rather his audiences would include craftsmen, merchants, politicians, the upper-class, the youth, the separatists and the assimilationists; but the poor would probably not be included among his audiences,[61] because it seems clear that his audience could freely choose how they were going to live. His work must have been accepted by a broad group of people, for the text was well preserved. Two manuscripts of Ecclesiastes were found at Qumran.[62] His work was known to Ben Sira.[63] His work must have been very popular in his period, for how otherwise do we explain its presence in the canon of the Old Testament in the face of rabbinic hostility?

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[57]Smith (1987), 122.
[58]Smith (1987), 123.
[59]Saldarini (1988), 257.
[60]Lohfink [(1990), 628.] points out that right from the start (Eccl. 1:13), Qohelet seems to wrestle with cynicism or, in Israel, with a kind of wisdom apocalypticism.
[61]Whybray (1989), 11.
[62]Ulrich (1992.), 142.
[63]Whybray (1989), 11.

Chapter Four

Some Aspects of Style and Language in Ecclesiastes

The style and the language of Ecclesiastes are quite different from other books in the Hebrew Bible. Though it is categorised by scholars as belonging to wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes has a unique style. Because of its peculiarity, some scholars suggest that this book was translated from Aramaic.[1] However, the fact that Hebrew fragments of Ecclesiastes were found in Qumran hardly supports this theory. Gordis argues strongly against the translation theory because he does not believe that the short space of time between the original composition of Ecclesiastes in Aramaic (if such a text existed at all) and the date of the Qumran fragments could have been sufficient for the translation process.[2] Thus Gordis is convincing when he argues that the book of Ecclesiastes was written in Hebrew.[3]

Gordis also does not agree with Dahood who suggests a Phoenician influence upon the language of Ecclesiastes. Dahood, insisting that Qohelet used Phoenician orthography, explains:

> The essential difference between Hebrew and Phoenician orthography, a difference which was greatly heightened in the post-exilic period, was the use of final and medial vowel letters by Hebrew and the total lack of them in standard Phoenician spelling. The medial *matres lectiones* were introduced into Biblical Hebrew about the sixth century B.C. under Aramaic influence, and the use of them became more and more abundant with the passing of centuries until by the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls, dating from the second and first centuries B.C., vowel letters were often employed to represent even short vowels....
>
> An examination of the variant readings in Qoheleth reveals that they are mostly of the type which would arise from the editing or the copying of an original text which lacked all vowel letters. An enumeration of the more important variants will show that the only adequate explanation for these divergencies is an underlying original which was composed in Phoenician orthography.[4]

Gordis argues against Dahood by pointing out that:

> Our present Masoretic text contains countless instances of the extreme *defectiva* spelling ("Phoenician") and of the extreme *plene* spelling characteristic of later rabbinic texts, which the medieval Masorates called חסר or חסר דחסר and מלא דמלא respectively. Generally, MT exhibits blending of the two orthographic modes. Thus we find both modes in the text, בְּחַלֹת (Lam 5:11) and בְּחוּלוֹת while בְּחַלּוֹת (Zec. 9:17) is the most usual. The Qumran Scrolls themselves manifest all these orthographic

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[1]Cf. Burkitt (1922), 22-28; Zimmermann (1945/46), 17-45.

[2]Gordis (1960), 395. He proposes that Ecclesiastes was written about 275-250 B.C.E.

[3]Gordis (1960), 396.

[4]Dahood (1952), 35-36.

> varieties in the same text, some of the documents spelling even the same word differently within a few lines of each other.[5]

Gordis gives an example from the Qumran fragment of Eccl. 6:8 that apparently has כמה for the Masoretic כימה.[6] Therefore, the *defectiva* spelling here would simply be one more example of the older, indigenous Hebrew orthography.

Fredericks agrees with Gordis and he demonstrates that the linguistic phenomena of Ecclesiastes for which Dahood finds Phoenician and Ugaritic parallels actually have Biblical Hebrew precedents.[7] Fredericks gives the following examples: the phrase על כל אשר היה לפני in Eccl. 1:16 is similar to על־כל־מלך לפניו in 1 Ch. 29:25; the phrase ארך רוח in Eccl. 7:8 is paralleled by קצר רוח in Ex. 6:9.[8]

Though both Gordis and Fredericks are convinced that Ecclesiastes was written in Hebrew, they recognize the characteristic difference in style from other Old Testament books. This difference is due to the genre of Ecclesiastes; it is not because of the date of the book. The sparse use of the *waw* consecutive imperfect in Ecclesiastes (1:17; 4:1, 7) has led the majority of scholars commenting on Ecclesiastes's language to conclude that Mishnaic Hebrew had influenced Ecclesiastes. This is because this verbal construction is virtually extinct in Mishnaic Hebrew.[9] Gordis gives the explanation of the strikingly rare use of the imperfect with waw consecutive in the *Manual of Discipline,* stating that the *Manual* is not narrative in character.[10] Ecclesiastes is not easily recognizable as a Biblical narrative. In fact, Loader points out that it is difficult to classify the genre of Ecclesiastes:

> The Jewish editors who prepared the text of the Old Testament received the book not as poetry but as prose, as we can tell from the accent marks they added to the vowels, using a system that differs from the one they applied to poetic books. The Greek translators of the Old Testament, however, listed Ecclesiastes among the poetic books and so indicated that they held a different opinion.[11]

From his literary analysis, Loader thinks that the Greek translators of the book were correct.[12] However, Loader also notices that poetry in Ecclesiastes displays an unusual metrical pattern and an even more unusual form. He reckons that the unusual form of

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[5]Gordis (1960), 397.
[6]Gordis (1960), 398.
[7]Fredericks (1988), 21.
[8]Fredericks (1988), 21.
[9]Fredericks (1988), 29. Cf. Isaksson (1987), 195.
[10]Gordis (1960), 406. Evidently, the *Manual of Discipline* likewise uses this form only three times, though the perfect waw consecutive is used much more often, 53 times.
[11]Loader (1986), 4. See also the discussion on p.5.
[12]Loader (1986), 4.

the book is caused by its unusual contents.[13] In fact, if we look carefully, we will notice that some parts of the book are prose or discourse. Gordis argues that Qohelet's medium is basically prose, with admixture of passages in verse. Gordis imagines that when Qohelet grew impassioned, he developed a subtle inner rhythm–this rythmic prose may go over into a regular metric line, which then, may revert to prose.[14] Thus, the composition of the book is not purely poetry. Prose and poetry are mixed in this book; at times it is difficult to separate them. Lohfink suggests that Qohelet uses a style of writting called *poikilometron* ("diversity of form")–the ready mixing of poetry and prose–which was also used by the Cynic Menippos of Gadara.[15] Actually the combination of prose and poetry in a single book is not uncommon in the Old Testament. The book of Job has prose at the begining and at the end of the book. In the prophetic books like Isaiah and Jeremiah we can find prose and poetry, but we can more readily identify the shift in style.

Indeed, Gordis admires the unique style of Ecclesiastes. He says "In any age Qoheleth would be an outstanding figure and his style would naturally mirror this characteristic difference. Moreover, his task was further complicated by the fact that he was a pioneer in the use of Hebrew for quasi-philosophic purposes, a use to which the language had not been previously applied".[16] It seems that Gordis thinks Ecclesiastes is a philosophical book, but he is not certain, indicated by the fact that he adds the prefix "quasi". That is, Ecclesiastes is not a purely philosophical or theological book, for it is not Qohelet's sole purpose to write only philosophically or theologically. Qohelet aimed to please as well as to state the truth as he saw it (Eccl. 12:10). He aims at us on the affective level as well as on the intellectual level. On one hand we should not interpret Ecclesiastes as a theological book, but on the other hand we should not interpret this book just as a piece of poetry, because Qohelet does not just entertain us with his skillful style of writting. He also wants us to think. One technique Qohelet uses to help us to think is to use hyperbolic language to shock us. He does not just want us to think but he also wants us to act because he gives advice on how we should live in this world. His advice is filled with understanding, care and concern. If we read this book through from beginning to end, we should notice the change of mood from harsh to gentle. One indication for this change is the frequency of use of the term הבל. This term is used more often in the first half of the book.

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[13]Loader (1986), 4.
[14]Gordis (1955), 110-111.
[15]Lohfink (1990), 19.
[16]Gordis (1960), 407.

Qohelet is like a musician rather than an artist as Good correctly points out.[17] Qohelet does not just write or play the melody (not in the literal sense) for us, but he also puts in words that correspond to the melody . He does not leave us to our own imagination, but persuades us to think deeply step by step, by supplying us with phrases and examples. Good suggests:

> There are fundamentally two ways of interpreting a text. One is to see it whole, finding the unifying structure, theme, image, or idea that light up the entirety and gives place and perspective to the parts. The other is to follow the text through its own process, to pursue its linearity in order to uncover the meaning progressively as the text itself presents it...
>
> On the whole, I believe, biblical interpreters have operated on the first way of interpreting, seeking out that which unifies a passage or book, looking for structures, unitary messages or ideas. That is not surprising, given the philosophical and theological bias of the cultural context within which we all stand. But I suggest that a linear or temporal (I am tempted to say, musical) mode of approach may elicit from a text something that the unitary or structural one misses. The process of presentation, the methods of discourse, the stylistic devices that carry a poem, a story, an argument along are not mere embellishments, dispensable by a clever interpreter, but are themselves integral elements of meaning."[18]

Good's suggestion seems to explain some problems we have when we try to find the meaning of some words.

When we want to know what Qohelet means when he uses certain terms in certain contexts, we regularly confront the problem of ambiguity. We may feel even more frustrated if we need to translate his work, because it is very difficult to find the right words for his special terms. If we accept Good's hypothesis, it seems possible that ambiguity is one of Qohelet's techniques:

> To apply such a model to the literary work, we hypothesize that something in the work first sets up in the reader a tendency to respond, arouses the expectation of a consequent, then inhibits the tendency, and finally brings the (or an) expected consequent. As we shall see, statements are often ambiguous, patent of more than one possible meaning; questions may imply more than one possible answer. Ambiguity itself is a stimulus to expect a consequent, though one may be the beginning of a pattern or a series of statements, which we expect to continue or, conversely, to close. The possibilities of the kinds of tendency to respond or of expectation are many, and their illustration in Qoh 1:2-11 will show several. If the hypothesis works, if the meaning of the passage (or meanings, if there are several) is to be found not simply in its unified "message" but in the very process by which the passage makes its linear way, then the style is the meaning, and perceiving the process as it unfolds is the interpretation.[19]

The ambiquity of meanings can also make most people find contradictions in the book. For example, the verb שמח and the derived noun שמחה express one of the *leit-motifs* of

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[17]Good (1978), 59-73

[18]Good (1978), 59.

[19]Good, (1978), 62. Good's use of the word *consequent* is unusual.

Qoheleth. According to Rashbam, in its seventeen occurrences in Ecclesiastes it has two basic meanings. One is negative, parallel to שחוק and denoting the hollow joy of the tavern, the merriment produced by wine.[20] The other is positive, that is joy or happiness, as God's greatest gift to man, and is the opposite of hedonistic pursuits.[21] This important term can have opposite meanings; no wonder that one can see several contradictions in the book.

Moreover, Qohelet uses another stylistic technique, that is, the delay of an expected consequence. Qoheleth does it in part with the use of the interrogative.[22] The examples are מַה־יִּתְרוֹן לָאָדָם (what profit is it to a man, 1:3). The reader might have expected the answer for verse 3 from verse 4, but he found a new topic instead. Clearly, the answer is to be found in 2:11 "there is no profit under the sun". Then a similar question appears again in 2:22. But this time a positive response can be found two verses later, "there is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil" (2:24). Another way to delay an expected consequence is to hold off a key word for some time.[23] An example of the technique is the location of the word הָרוּחַ (wind) in 1:6. This word is the subject of verse 6, but it is put almost at the end of the verse. Before this word is introduced the reader might have thought that the subject of this verse is the "sun" from verse 5, and he can not be sure until the fourth word that the subject has changed (הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־דָּרוֹם וְסוֹבֵב אֶל־צָפוֹן סוֹבֵב ו סֹבֵב הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ וְעַל־סְבִיבֹתָיו שָׁב הָרוּחַ:). Still another way to delay an expected consequence is to interpose something else, or what seems like something else, between the expectation and its fulfillment, to give a consequence that is not expected.[24] An example of this technique is the line "The sea is not full (1:7)" which lingers for some time until completed by "an ear will not be filled of hearing (1:8)". Sometimes, a certain idea is delayed even longer. The idea "there is time for all thing under heaven" (3:1) which is expanded to a evocative poem (3:2-8), seems to emphasise universal experiences. Abruptly, this poem is interrupted by a despairing question "What advantage does the worker get from what he has laboured? (3:9). It seems as if the subject changes after 3:9, but the idea that "there is time for everything" appears again in 3:17 (there is time for every activity and for every deed). This repetition reinforces one of the major themes of the poem.

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[20]Japhet and Salters (1985), 65.
[21]Japhet and Salters (1985), 65.
[22]Good (1978), 72.
[23]Good (1978), 72.
[24]Good (1978), 72.

Knowing that Qohelet is using this delaying technique, the interpreter should wait to find out Qohelet's thoughts, and the meanings of words. However he should not only look for the answers on the cognitive level, but on the affective level as well. Moreover, he should not pay too much attention to a particular topic at a certain passage; for Qohelet may change his topics once in a while, often repeating the same topics after some interruptions.

After reading the whole book one may ask "What makes the book so popular? Why does it still remain in the canon?". The answer may be "because of its contents", or "because of its style", or "because of its orthodoxy". I think it is the first two reasons combined plus its openness and its sincerity. I do not think that one passage alone (12:13-14) has earned the book canonicity. Apart from this section, there are many other orthodox sections in the book.[25] The main concern for the Rabbis, is not its unorthodoxy but its self-contradictory tendencies as can be found in the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath, 30b:

> Rab Judah, son of R. Samuel b. Shilath said in Rab's name: The sages wished to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes because its words are self-contradictory ... And how are its words self-contradictory? It is written: "anger is better than play (שחוק)" (7:3) but it is written: "I said of laughter (שחוק) it is to be praised" (2:2). It is written "Then I commended joy (שמחה)" (8:15) but it is written: "and of joy (שמחה)(I said) What doeth it" (2:2).

The problem of contradictions in the book still vexes modern scholars, but the ancient audience were not bothered by this problem; the editor of the book does not make any attempt to clarify or resolve its contradictions. However, he does defend its words as upright and true (12:10). Either he did not see the contradictions or he might have more easily tolerated contradictory facts. It seems more likely that the latter is the case.

Qohelet seems to recognise that some people may not be able to tolerate contradictions, so he uses contradictory facts to stimulate their thinking and at the same time he prepares them to accept the contradiction by introducing the poem "There is time for everything" (3:1-8). This poem illustrates the extreme opposite facts of life, accepted in traditional wisdom. Ancient sages believed that there was a right time and a wrong time for everything, and they devoted considerable energy to discerning proper times.[26] In the absence of written evidence, we can assume that Qohelet had extensive oral traditions at his disposal. He knew how to use them wisely. Many materials used by him were supposedly popular in his time. However, he was not bound by them;

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[25]Cf. 2:26; 3:14; 5:3; 7:12, 14; 8:12-13.

[26]Crenshaw (1987), 92.

even the traditional Biblical texts familiar to him were utilised by Qohelet in his special manner.

In addition also he was able to accommodate many kinds of different literary styles in his work; that is why no one has been able to reach a definite conclusion about the genre of Ecclesiastes. Dell points out "Ecclesiastes, like Job, can be divided up by working with various genre levels. The quest to find an overall genre for the book has been almost as fruitless as the search for an overall genre for Job".[27] Loader suggests that "there are more inclusive genres that contain ever smaller genres (wisdom literature → reflection → proverb → simile or comparison)".[28] Loader, then offers a few examples of the literary forms used by Qohelet:

> a. A *true saying* is the formulation of a generally applicable truth....
>
> b. The *"better than" saying* or comparative saying is a comparison between two things in which the priority of one over the other is stated....
>
> c. The *"as ... so" comparison* is of a different nature and occurs several times....
>
> d. The *metaphor* is a forceful comparison in which image and reality (without comparatives) are equated....
>
> e. A more extended genre in wisdom literature is the *parable,* a story intended to teach. The Preacher uses such short stories in 4:13-16 and 9:14-15 to express his conviction that wisdom is useless....
>
> f. An *allegory* is a series of related metaphors, an example of which is 12:3-4 (also v. 6), which can be compared with Proverbs 5:15ff....
>
> g. A characteristic genre in Ecclesiastes is that of the *observation* , the report of what the Preacher has seen in life...
>
> h. Sometimes one finds in Ecclesiastes samples of *authobiographical narrative....*
>
> i. The *woe-cry* and the *beatitude* occur side by side: " Woe to you, O land, whose king is a child who does not know enough to consult a counselor and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at proper time and not as drunkards!" (10:15b-17)....
>
> j. The *antilogion* is a particularly interesting genre, because it contains an apparent contradiction between two opposites. An example occurs in Ecclesiates 7:16-17 (Do not be overrighteous...do not be overwicked"; "neither be overwise... and do not be a fool"[NIV])....
>
> k. The *rhetorical question* is a question that presupposes its own answer. Ecclesiastes frequently uses this forceful form of speech (the expected answer is always negative) and so shows the same kind of preference that Job did (cf. Job 38 and 39): "The word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, 'what are you doing?'" (8:4).
>
> l. The Preacher, like the author of Proverbs, often uses the form of an *admonition.* It is used when a command is given or advice is offered, accompanied–which is the rule in Ecclesiastes–by a statement of motivation: "Be not quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools" (7:9).[29]

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[27]Dell (1991), 138.

[28]Loader (1986), 5.

[29]Loader (1986), 5-7. See also the discussion on p. 6. Dell [(1991), 139-140.] also identifies three principle smaller genres: wisdom saying, instruction, and reflection.

In every category, Loader adds some parallel examples from Psalms or Proverbs or Job or Sirach. After this list he thus concludes "It is evident, therefore, that the Preacher both knows and uses the typical forms and conventions of wisdom literature".[30]

Loader's conclusion seems possible, but not every wisdom book has all these forms. Proverbs tends to use categories a, b, d, f, i, and l. In contrast, Ecclesiastes is smaller, but is able to use all these forms. Why did Qohelet use so many forms in such a short book? Did he just want to demonstrate how clever or how skilful he was? It seems more likely that he used all the available means to enforce his message and also to bring his message across to different kinds of audiences. People with different personalities receive a message differently. Some people perceive a message through a parable, some through an allegory, some through an experience; and some need additional stimulation, thus an antilogion and a rhetorical question are helpful. Moreover, Qohelet seems to use these different forms to control the meanings of words he uses regularly. For example the term ראה if used in the observation form can be translated "I saw" or "I observed" (4:4); if used in the admonition form it can be translated "enjoy" (9:9).

Though we can find these genres in other wisdom books, Qohelet seems to prefer using some genres (such as the observation, the antilogion, and the rhetorical question) that are not often used in other wisdom books. Dell also indicates:

> When the author wants to make some comment of his own he uses the third main smaller genre, that of 'reflection'. This genre is a characteristic of Ecclesiastes alone... The genre 'reflection' refers to texts containing observation and thought, and incorporates within several subgenres such as sayings or proverbs (eg 2:14;4:5-6), rhetorical questions (eg 2:2, 12, 15,19, 22, 25) and quotations ...–all subgenres from the wisdom tradition. This genre 'reflection' both includes traditional wisdom elements and provides room for Qoheleth's own remarks which give the book its distinctiveness. This is Qoheleth's new contribution. He changes the nature of reflection, creating a new style within a traditional one.[31]

After this observation, Dell proposes that Qohelet used a technique perhaps best described as a reuse of forms since the content of the forms remains the same.[32] In fact Dell follows Loader who emphasizes the polar relations between form and content in Ecclesiastes. Loader concludes:

> *The tension in the contents of the book and between the contents and formal aspects testify to the tension between the views of Qoheleth and those of the general hokma...*[33]

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[30]Loader (1986), 7.
[31]Dell (1991), 140.
[32]Dell (1991), 140.
[33]Loader (1979), 116.

Thus Qohelet is free in using his own stylistic features to convey his own thought, though he uses forms predominantly from the wisdom tradition. In fact he reuses the form and content in a new context in such a way that their meanings are changed.

One of the techniques Qohelet uses to relate to the wisdom tradition is the use of quotations. Gordis identifies four methods and purposes of the use of quotations of proverbs in Ecclesiastes.[34] First, there is the straightfoward use of proverbial quotations, cited to support an argument which the writer accepts as true (10:18; 11:1). Secondly, proverbs are used to support his argument, while the rest of the saying, though irrelevant, is quoted for the sake of completeness (5:1-2; 11:3-4). Thirdly, proverbial quotations are used as a text, on which the author comments from his own viewpoint (7:1-14; 4:9-12; 5:9-12; 8:2-4). Finally, contrasting proverbs are used to contravene accepted doctrines (4:5-6; 9:16, 18). Actually, Gordis is not the first one who recognizes the use of quotations in Ecclesiastes. Rashbam "preceded Gordis in observing the existence of quotations in Qoheleth, but his motives and guidelines are purely literary, devoid of any apology".[35] Compared with Qohelet's contemparary reader, we, the modern reader, hardly recognize the quotations, for there are no quotation marks supplied in the Hebrew text. Therefore we need some indicators to help us to recognize them.

Some of the quotations are explicitly suggested by the text, as in 1:10, while others are indicated by other means. One way to recognize a quotation is to notice the change of person. In 4:8, Rashbam supplies the necessary hypothetical question: "For he should reckon: for whom am I toiling so much and depriving myself of enjoyment?".[36] Moreover, a change of both person and literary form also can be found, as in 12:11ff. According to Rashbam, 12:8-14 are the work of the editors who state in verse 10 "The Preacher sought to find pleasing words and uprightly he wrote words of truth". What follow, in verses 11ff., are the words of Solomon, quoted by these editors in order to illustrate their point.[37]

Another indicator is the expression of an opposite view in the midst of a pericope with a specific theme. An example of this indicator is found in 8:12. The positive statement of this verse: "I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear in his presence" is located in the midst of harsh words from 8:9-14. Rashbam suggests that verses 12-13 are the words of the evil men mentioned in verse 11. Thus Rashbam opens his interpretation of these two verses with "for they say to

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[34]Gordis (1955), 99-108.
[35]Japhet and Salters (1985), 52-53.
[36]Japhet and Salters (1985), 53.
[37]Japhet and Salters (1985), 53.

themselves", and explains them at length.[38] In contrast Gordis thinks the quotation belongs to Qohelet for he translates:

> I know the answer that "it will be well in the end with those who revere God because they fear Him and it will be far from well with the sinner, who, like a shadow, will not long endure, because he does not fear God."[39]

Knowing what part of the book is a quotation is one thing, but to know exactly to whom the quotation belongs is another thing. Though recognition of the use of quotations in Ecclesiastes is helpful for interpreting the book, extra effort is needed to clarify each quotation. The interpreter needs to follow each argument in the book closely. Qohelet may quote traditional wisdom sayings to challenge them or to use them to support his arguments. Several options should be considered carefully, and any conclusion probably needs to be postponed until a similar usage appears again.

Another interesting literary feature employed by Qohelet is the use of an additional יש in a nominal sentence. It occurs in Ecclesiastes in the following verses: 1:10; 2:21; 4:8, 9; 5:12; 6:1, 11; 7:15; 8:6, 14; 9:4; 10:5. Michel suggests that the use of יש is the indicator of special emphasis.[40] He perceives that the existence of יש contradicts the general experience or expectation, as is found in Prov. 13:7.[41] The other examples from Proverbs are 11:24; 12:18; 13:23; 14:12; 18:24; 20:15. All the verses quoted illustrate this uncommon phenomenon. Here it appears to be a phenomenon that occurs in the typical wisdom tradition, signalling the beginning of the *Maschal*.[42] Michel also points out:

> Mit dem יש–Aussagen greift Qohelet aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach eine auch sonst in der Weisheit vorkommende Form auf. Was aber in der üblichen Weisheit eine auch vorkommende Randerscheinung ist, nämlich das Konstatieren von „paradoxen Phänomenen" (Hermisson), wird bei Qohelet zu einer wichtigen für ihn charakteristischen Aussageform. Am deutlichsten liegt diese Denk–und Argumentationsform wohl in 8,12b-14 vor. Zu welchen Folgerungen man kommen kann, wenn man sie nicht erkennt und also nicht sieht, daß Qohelet mit dem יש–Satz von einem Grenzphänomen her gegen eine übliche Meinung argumentiert, demonstrieren z.B. Galling und Lauha, die vv. 12b-13 für eine sekundäre Ergänzung halten. In Wirklichkeit aber wird durch die Herauslösung dieser Verse der Argumentationszusammenhang zerstört: die betonten יש–Sätze in v.14 hängen dann in der Luft![43]

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[38]Japhet and Salters (1985), 54.
[39]Gordis (1955), 174.
[40]Michel (1989), 184.
[41]Michel (1989), 184.
[42]Michel (1989), 185. *Maschal* is a Hebrew word denoting a wide category of linguistic forms, such as: taunt (Is. 14:4), riddle (Ps. 49:4) allegory (Ezek. 17:2-3), byword (Deut.28:31), dirge (Micah 2:4).
[43]Michel (1989), 199.

It seems obvious that Qohelet uses יֵשׁ to demonstrate that what people usually believe is not true all the time; there can be some exceptions. There are several examples of exceptions in Ecclesiastes and Qohelet purposely uses יֵשׁ to indicate these exceptions or to limit cases. Moreover when Qohelet uses יֵשׁ, we can be certain that the statements that follow יֵשׁ belong to him.

Another linguistic element found in Ecclesiastes is the use of the particle כִּי. Actually, it is a simple Hebrew word, but it is quite important for any interpreter to understand its usages in the book before interpreting them. Michel warns that כִּי can be confusing for us because of its diversity of meanings: it can introduce subject or object clauses, causal clauses, conditional clauses, concessive clauses, and perhaps also relative clauses.[44] Within the book's limited scope the particle כִּי appears almost ninety times, twice in every five verses.[45] In his commentary, Rashbam gives some sort of attention to this particle in all but ten of the ninety cases.[46] On more than sixty occasions it is assigned an explicit equivalent, usually שהרי (for), sometimes ש (that), sometimes אלא, רק (but), and לפי (so that).[47] Rashbam seems to be the first who attaches great importance to the understanding of the specific nuances of the particle כִּי. However, he also recognises that in many cases it is in accordance with the usual usages in the Old Testament. Michel shows that כִּי can occasionally be used specially by Qohelet to introduce his own commentary or explanation after quoting a traditional wisdom saying.[48] Michel gives several examples and one of the examples is 8:6-7.

כִּי לְכָל־חֵפֶץ יֵשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט כִּי־רָעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו׃
כִּי־אֵינֶנּוּ יֹדֵעַ מַה־שֶּׁיִּהְיֶה כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מִי יַגִּיד לוֹ׃

Michel understands that 8:2-5 is a quotation from traditional wisdom.[49] כִּי occurs four times in verses 6-7. Michel sees that the first כִּי does not serve as a hypotaxis signal, and does not introduce the dependent clause, but an independent statement instead.[50] Grammatically, כִּי is not defined as a (subordinate) conjunction, but as a deictic (or strengthening) particle to emphasize the following clauses.[51] Schoors has a similar suggestion, for he translates this כִּי not by "for" but by

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[44]Michel (1989), 200.
[45]Japhet and Salters (1985), 43-44.
[46]Japhet and Salters (1985), 44.
[47]Japhet and Salters (1985), 44.
[48]Michel (1989), 201.
[49]Michel (1989), 201.
[50]Michel (1989), 202.
[51]Michel (1989), 202.

"surely".[52] Thus, there are several possible translations for the first כִּי; such as: "truly", "however" (when one wants to emphasize the contrast) or simply "now". And when this כִּי is used together with יֵשׁ, Michel's viewpoint is quite convincing.[53] The other examples of similar usages given by Michel are found in 2:21-23; 2:25-26; 6:8; 7:7; 8:12b; 9:4-5; 9:11-12; 11:6; 11:1-2.[54] Therefore when we are translating כִּי in Ecclesiastes we should consider the possiblity of an asseverative usage separate from its use as an explicative conjunction. Especially when we do not see a logical connection between statements (7:7), we should translate it as an asseverative particle.[55] Sometimes neither translation changes the meaning of the text (2:26).[56]

Qohelet seems to follows the style of the wisdom tradition, but with some modification. One of the wisdom forms that Qohelet frequently uses is the "better saying". We can recognize this saying by the traditional טוב...מן pattern, in which a non-narrative usage is marked by the use of טוב as an adjective expressing the comparative with מן.[57] On this basis the following 16 examples are to be noted: 4:3, 6, 9, 13; 5:4; 6:3b, 9; 7:1a, 2, 3, 5, 8a; 9:4, 16, 18. In addition, there is a second group consisting of 4:2, 17 (5:1); 7:1b; 9:17 ; though they lack the טוב–element, they are indisputably "better sayings" in intent and operation.[58] Each reflects a different syntactical arrangement, with subjects expressed by a noun (4:2; 7:1b), and infinitive (4:17[5:1]), or a participial clause (9:17).[59] An explanation for the omission of the טוב in three of the four instances given can be offered on the grounds that 4:2; 7:1b and 9:17 coexist with other "better sayings", that is, with 4:3; 7:1a; 9:16 and 18. Only one 4:17 (5:1) stands in isolation from other uses of the genre. A major factor in this kind of abbreviation of the basic form must then be attributable to the proximity of other forms and their influence.[60] Ogden points out that Qohelet not only uses the "better saying" as an introductory device for marking a change or transition in the discussion, but the more active one of actually setting up the values to be explicated in the remainder of the pericope.

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[52]Schoors (1986), 211.
[53]See also 2:21; the first כִּי is used for introducing the ground for 2:20. This first כִּי may be translated "Well!".
[54]Michel (1989), 203-212.
[55]Schoors (1986), 211.
[56]Schoors (1986), 209.
[57]Ogden (1977), 492.
[58]Ogden (1977), 492.
[59]Ogden (1977), 493.
[60]Ogden (1977), 493.

Another similar but quite unusual form is אין טוב (nothing is better). This form is not known outside Ecclesiastes–probably this form was not known prior to Qohelet's use of it, or such forms were indeed known but are no longer extant.[61] This form occurs in the book on four occasions (2:24; 3:12, 22; 8:15). Ogden observes that:

> Each example of the form is followed by a clause which makes specific reference to the God-givenness of the human situation (cf. 2:25-26; 3:13, 22; 8:15). The purpose of this subordinate clause would appear to be the validation of the advice enshrined in the אין טוב form by relating the advice to the divine intention for man's enjoyment. In 2:24 and 3:22 the deictic כי is used with this specific purpose.[62]

From this function of אין טוב we may conclude that this form originated from the creative hands of Qohelet. It is his means of setting forth his advice on how best to cope with a life which is God-given but fraught with enigmas such that man's limited knowledge and ability to comprehend it leave him without the final and absolute answers for which he craves.[63] This form also seems to indicate that the advice to enjoy life is the best that human beings can hope for, given their limitation in understanding the futility of life. The אין טוב form approaches that function which is uppermost in the use of the טוב...מן, though the אין טוב form is a development from the basic טוב ...מן form.[64] Qohelet needs to develop this new form, because he sees that advice given in the טוב ...מן form does not give an adequate picture of life. Life is more complicated than "A is better than B" as shown in 2:13-15. In other words, for Qohelet, the statement that wisdom is better than folly is not enough; since both fool and wise men have the same ultimate fate, what good is wisdom?

Another distinctive use of the אין טוב form may lie in a specific relationship between the form and the question, "What does a man get from all his toil?".[65] Possibly, this form is the response to this rhetorical question. Qohelet interests his audience with the rhetorical question (1:3), then gives several examples of unsatisfactory answers (2:1-23), before giving his positive advice (2:24-26). This relationship suggests that the musical analogy recommended by Good seems an appropriate key to understanding Qohelet's thought. The final אין טוב form occurs in 8:15 to express the advice which springs from the response implicit in 7:15-8:14 to the question posed as far back as 6:11-12. However, the theme of enjoyment does not conclude with 8:15; Qohelet repeats this theme in 9:7-10 and 11:9 in simple and direct

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[61]Ogden (1979), 339.
[62]Ogden (1979), 341.
[63]Ogden (1979), 342.
[64]Ogden (1979), 342.
[65]Ogden (1979), 342.

fashion. The framework provided by the מַה־יִּתְרוֹן (what benefit) question and the אין טוב form, indeed, permits us to see the place of the smaller units of which Ecclesiastes is composed as finding their place in the movement of thought from question to response and advice, thus allowing better understanding of those smaller components.[66]

As has been mentioned, Ecclesiastes is not purely poetry; however, there is one poetical feature frequently used by Qohelet. This feature is a play on words (paronomasia) which can be recognized from the Hebrew text. Qohelet links his thoughts not only through content and contexts, but also through sounds of the words. For example, in 8:8:

אֵין אָדָם שַׁלִּיט בְּרוּחַ לִכְלוֹא אֶת־הָרוּחַ וְאֵין שִׁלְטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת וְאֵין מִשְׁלַחַת
בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְלֹא־יְמַלֵּט רֶשַׁע אֶת־בְּעָלָיו׃

There are four cola in this verse. The first three begin with the word אֵין but in each colon, there is the recurrence of words which have similar sounds in close proximity to other words in other cola though their forms are different. These words are שַׁלִּיט (having power over), שִׁלְטוֹן (power over), מִשְׁלַחַת (discharge), and יְמַלֵּט (let go). These four cola demonstrate parallelism, focusing on the final colon as a punch line by changing the negative אֵין to לֹא, given the fact that Qohelet follows the grammatical rule, using the negative לֹא with a finite verb. This final colon is also used as a conclusion of a smaller unit, though there is another conclusion following verse 9. It is likely that Qohelet uses this technique to underscore his points. Other examples of paronomasia can be found in 1:6, 9; 2:11, and there are many more. Clearly, Qohelet uses all the tools at his disposal in order to present his thoughts.

Fredericks notices another unique literary feature of Ecclesiastes, that is the so-called "pleonastic" אני found posterior to its conjugated verb.[67] This feature occurs in Ecclesiastes twenty times: with the simple perfect (1:16; 2:1, 24; 3:17, 18; 5:17; 7:25), and with the conjunctive waw perfect (2:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 15, 18, 20; 4:1, 4, 7; 8:15; 9:16).[68] It appears only five times in other Biblical passages: 2 Sam. 17:15; Cant. 5:5, 6; Dan. 10:7; 12:5. What is then an oddity in Biblical Hebrew is a frequent feature in Ecclesiastes.[69] Fredericks observes that the conclusions drawn in the book and the recounting of past experiences fall within two frameworks: a time when Qohelet

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[66]Ogden (1979), 349.
[67]Fredericks (1988), 63.
[68]Fredericks (1988), 63.
[69]Fredericks (1988), 63.

pursued a special investigation (2:12-13), and also the time of the presentation of Ecclesiastes as a whole (3:10, 12,14).[70] In the first case the simple perfect or conjunctive waw perfect is used with אני (such as in 2:13 וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי), while the second case is expressed by the first person perfect without אני (such as in 3:10 רָאִיתִי). Both can be translated as "I saw", or "I have seen". To reduce the ambiquity, Fredericks suggests that "when Qohelet wished to describe an act or thought as simple past (preterite), he added אני to the conjugated perfect, thus referring to his specific quest."[71] On the other hand the implication for those first singular perfects without the subsequent pronoun is that they are allowed any tense within the normal scope of the Biblical Hebrew perfect, such as perfective, pluperfective, present, as well as preterite.[72] This special feature, indeed, helps us to identify Qohelet's intention, and helps us to be consistent in our translation.

All the evidence mentioned above suggests that Qohelet was a well educated man who was able to use a wide variety of literary forms to express his thoughts. He was a talented man with a creative mind who intelligently modified traditional tools or sometimes invented new tools to communicate his ideas to his contemporaries who were facing a new life style involving fierce competition for material gain. The way Qohelet reused the traditional forms also implies that he did not discard their value entirely. Indeed, he saw several weak points in traditional wisdom, but he still sought for his answers through this means. The main problem of the traditional wisdom was its rigidity. Qohelet demonstrated that life is more complicated than the traditional wisdom taught. This book can hardly be a mere collection of sayings for several literary frameworks can be found. If it was only a collection of sayings, the contradictions found in this book would not create any problem. In addition to using available resources (oral and perhaps written), Qohelet modified traditional grammatical expressions in order to clearly express his transformation of traditional thinking.

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[70]Fredericks (1988), 65.
[71]Fredericks (1988), 69.
[72]Fredericks (1988), 69.

Chapter Five

The Structure and Purposes of Ecclesiastes

In the previous chapter we have seen that Qohelet uses several forms and techniques to express his thoughts. He seems to organise his thoughts very well, though there is a mixture of forms and techniques. This causes many scholars to disagree about what kind of structure might be present in the book. However, all recognise that there is an introduction and a conclusion.[1] Whybray sees no progression of thought from one section to another, rather a certain cyclical tendency is observable.[2] It is not easy to notice the sequence of thought in the book because of the interruption technique employed by Qohelet. However, Qohelet planned his presentation carefully, for he consciously used some words or phrases repeatedly. He uses many examples and reasons to support his argument. He makes use of several literary techniques to introduce new topics. For example, when we examine those instances where רָאִיתִי is used with the phrase תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ (under the sun), we can notice that this combined phrase introduces a new idea or observation.[3] However, when he uses this phrase he seems to focus on the same themes previously addressed by him, possibly with slight variation.

The style and content of the book give the impression that it has a coherent structure. However, the structure of Ecclesiastes is a complicated problem as the contrasting views of the scholars surveyed in this chapter will make clear. Many scholars have attempted to delineate the plan of the book, but no one has fully succeeded. They are only able to demonstrate some aspects of the framework of the book. However, some evidence found by these scholars shows that Ecclesiastes is a well organised book. Moreover, the epilogist of the book also confirms this view when he says:

> וְיֹתֵר שֶׁהָיָה קֹהֶלֶת חָכָם עוֹד לִמַּד־דַּעַת אֶת־הָעָם וְאִזֵּן וְחִקֵּר תִּקֵּן מְשָׁלִים הַרְבֵּה׃
>
> Besides being a sage, Qohelet taught people knowledge, and he **weighed (listened to), searched out and arranged (put right)** many proverbs (Eccl. 12:9).

The epilogist uses three Hebrew verbs (תִּקֵּן, חִקֵּר, אִזֵּן) to describe the way Qohelet dealt with numerous proverbs. The meaning of each of these three verbs is not entirely

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[1]Fredericks (1989), 17.
[2]Whybray (1989), 17.
[3]Cf. 3:16; 4:1; 5:12; 6:1; 9:13; 10:5.

clear. The first, אזן is the only instance of the verb אזן (to weigh) in biblical Hebrew, although מאזנים (scales) occurs several times in the Old Testament (Isa. 40:12, 15; Jer. 32:10; Ps. 62:10; Job 6:2; Dan. 5:27). Gordis proposes that this verb means "measure out, scan".[4] However, Whitley suggests that it should be rendered "listen" on the basis of several ancient versions that have a reference to the ear or hearing.[5] Both proposed meanings suggest that Qohelet takes account of the wisdom of other people. The second, חקר (only here in Piel form) means, in Qal, "to search, explore or examine".[6] However, this verb appears in the Hebrew text of Sir 44:5 (חוֹקְרֵי מְזִמּוֹר עַל חוֹק נוֹשְׂאֵי מָשָׁל בִּכְתָב) referring to (musical) composition. This meaning seems to suggest that Qohelet himself composed several proverbs. The third, תקן is used in 1:15 and 7:13 in the sense of setting something straight. Murphy translates this word as "correct" without any explanation.[7] This verb also appears in Sir 47:9 (נִגִּינוֹת שִׁיר לִפְנֵי מִזְבֵּחַ וְקוֹל מִזְמוֹר בִּנְבָלִים תִּיקֵן) in the sense of organising or arranging musical settings. Whybray points out that in rabbinic Hebrew it can mean "set in order" or "establish, ordain".[8] In this context, it may mean arranging or putting proverbs in order. Though the specific meanings of these three verbs cannot be identified, it is possible to gain a tentative understanding of what the epilogist is getting at. That is, he understands that Qohelet examined traditional proverbs, composed his own proverbs, and then arranged them. The materials found in Ecclesiastes are not mere collections of sayings.

Unfortunately, the epilogist does not show us how this book is structured. He only tells us that Qohelet arranged proverbs, but he does not tell us how Qohelet arranged them. The question of identifying the structure of this book remains. Different scholars use various means to find the answer. So far, there is no agreement on the way in which the book has been put together.[9] This problem may be explained from the fact that the structure of the book cannot be seen from its surface appearance, or that Qohelet uses a method which is alien to western logic. There may be some hidden signals in the text, giving us some clues for understanding the structure of the book. Much effort has been expended by some scholars to detect these clues, and some of their suggestions will be examined in this chapter.

Fox argues that Ecclesiastes is a narration, the product of authorship not of editorship.[10] Fox argues for a single author because he sees Qohelet's reflections as a

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[4]Gordis (1955), 342. Cf. Ogden (1987), 209.
[5]Whitley (1979), 102. Cf. Fox (1989), 323.
[6]Whybray (1989), 170.
[7]Murphy (1992), 123.
[8]Whybray (1989), 171.
[9]Whybray (1989), 21.
[10]Fox (1977), 83.

single search, with the goal set forth clearly in 1:13.[11] Fox also explains the existence of references to Qohelet in the third-person form by recognizing a different narrative voice from that of the first person. He thinks that the epilogist is the person who tells the story of Qohelet.[12] This speaker or frame-narrator, according to Fox, is the transmitter of Qohelet's words.[13] Then he proposes that Ecclesiastes is built on successive levels, each with a perspective that encompasses the next:

> Level 1. The frame-narrator, who tells about
> Level 2a. Qohelet-the-reporter, the narrating "I," who speaks from the vantage point of old age and looks back on
> Level 2b. Qohelet-the-seeker, the experiencing "I," the younger Qohelet who made the fruitless investigation introduced in 1:12f.[14]

Fox concludes that level 1 and 2 are different persons; levels 2a and 2b are different perspectives of one person. Fox's proposal is interesting; it is however, unsatisfying, for he fails to demonstrate how this paradigm can be fitted into the text. Level 1 can be easily worked out by any reader, but the distinction between level 2a and 2b is hardly made clear. In fact level 2a and 2b cover almost the whole book, but Fox pays most of his attention to the role of the epilogist. Fox's work is insightful, but does not adequately explain the structure of the book.

Loader notices that there is no logical development of thought reflected in the composition of the book, but there are various separate pericopes.[15] However, he sees that separate pericopes are compositionally related to each other, because a basic idea runs through all of them.[16] After he has analysed the literary style of the book, he demonstrates the presence of polarised thought patterns in the contents, suggesting that they interlock with polar patterns in the form and polar relations between form and contents.[17] Loader finds several passages treating the same topics. For examples, 3:1-9 and 7:1-4 are grouped under "conservation, life-abandonment, death", while 1:12-2:26; 4:13-16; 7:5-7; 7:11-14; 7:15-22; 7:23-8:1; 8:16-17; 9:11-12; 9:13-10:1, 10:2-7; and 10:8-11 are grouped under "worth(lessness) of wisdom.[18] In each literary unit

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[11]Fox (1977), 90.
[12]Fox (1977), 91.
[13]Fox (1977), 91.
[14]Fox (1977), 91.
[15]Loader (1979), 9.
[16]Loader (1979), 9.
[17]Loader (1979), 29-116.
[18]Loader (1979), 29-66.

Loader always concludes with the format: pole, contra-pole, and tension.[19] For example, Loader sketches the polar structure of the thought pattern of 3:1-9 as follows:

> Pole: Life, conservation. Contra-pole: Abandonment, death.
> Tension: No security, surrender of helpless man to the eventualities of life.[20]

Loader finds the key to the structure of Ecclesiastes in the content of the book. He sees that the worthlessness of wisdom is the dominant topic of the book, giving this title to 11 out of 31 literary units.[21] Further, the outline of the book given by Loader[22] suggests that the book consists of a loose collection of separate utterances. However, Loader recognises that the "poems of the book each constitute a unit by themselves but are held together by more than a common theme".[23]

Ogden admits that it is difficult to determine the structure of Ecclesiastes, though the structural features in the individual pericopes can be found.[24] He suggests that the various blocks of material which comprise the book are seen as individually relating to a theme.[25] Further he argues:

> that a programmatic question about humanity's *yitrôn* or 'advantage' (1.3), together with its answer (negative), and the response which flows from that, provide the framework necessary for understanding Qoheleth's structure. These three features form a basic framework for chs. 1-8, and allow us to accommodate all the intervening material. We see the examples from personal and social life contributing to the discussion of the question about *yitrôn* (1:3), and to its answer–there is no *yitrôn*–and leading into the advice that life as a gift from God must be enjoyed. Each subsection is relevant to the search for an answer to that basic question. As we move from ch. 8 into the final chapters, 9-12, there is a shift to discourse material in which the value of wisdom itself is appraised, especially in light of a life which is so marked by the enigmatic. The former, chs. 1-8, provide the setting for this final discourse.[26]

Ogden's analysis separates this book into two parts, with the second part depending on the first. He calls the second part a discourse, thus he sees that the final part of the book contains mainly teaching materials. In the eighteen usages of the root יתר, only two appear in the second part of the book (10:10, 11). Ogden's suggestion is a possible way to look at the structure of Ecclesiastes.

Farmer places Ecclesiastes together with Proverbs, for she thinks that our ancestors in the faith intended for us to read them together, as collection with a

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[19]In his new book *Ecclesiastes* (Eerdmans, 1986), p. 33, Loader changes this format to thought, counterthought, and result.
[20]Loader (1979), 33.
[21]Loader (1979), 112.
[22]Loader (1979), 112.
[23]Loader (1986), 8.
[24]Ogden (1987), 12.
[25]Ogden (1987), 12.
[26]Ogden (1987), 13.

"prologue" (Prov. 1:2-7) and an "epilogue" (Eccl. 12:11-14).[27] Her reason is that "all of the oldest witnesses to the arrangement of the books in the biblical canon list Proverbs and Ecclesiastes next to each other, and in that order."[28] In fact this is a position which has been defended by Wilson, who suggests that the epilogue of Ecclesiastes serves to bind Ecclesiastes together with Proverbs and provides a canonical key to the interpretation of both.[29] Wilson's argument is based on the combined phrase דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים ("words of the wise[men]") with which Eccl. 12:11 begins. He reckons that the plural form חֲכָמִים would not refer to Qohelet alone.[30] Moreover, he sees a link between the prologue of Proverbs and the epilogue of Qohelet with the use of the same phrase (דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים) in Prov. 1:6.[31]

Wilson draws upon additional evidence to support his argument in considering the arrangement of the Hebrew Bible. He points to the earliest list of the books found in *Baba Bathra* 14b (probably early third century C.E.): "The order of the Writings is Ruth, the book of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes,...". But so far we do not have an ancient scroll that contains Proverbs and Ecclesiastes together. Sarna points out that the fixing of the order in *Baba Batra* may arise from the combination of library needs and pedagogic considerations.[32] The arrangement would be the order in which the individual scrolls were shelved and cataloged in the Palestinian archives and schools.[33]

Wilson's proposal is interesting but it does not help us to understand the purpose of Qohelet. It only shows that the editor thought that Ecclesiastes is similar to Proverbs; Qohelet was one of the wise men. This viewpoint would lead us to think of the content in Ecclesiastes as mere collections of sayings. However, the sayings in Ecclesiastes are not randomly arranged, but are normally framed by repeated phrases, a phenomenon not present in Proverbs. Therefore Ecclesiastes cannot be easily seen as an appendage to Proverbs. Moreover, there are major differences in the sequence of the book of Proverbs between the MT and the LXX. According to their headings, the following eight collections of proverbial material are recognized in the book of Proverbs according to the MT:

I	1:1-9:18	("The proverbs of Solomon")
II	10:1-22:16	("The proverbs of Solomon")

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[27]Farmer (1991), 4.
[28]Farmer (1991), 4.
[29]Wilson (1984), 179.
[30]Wilson (1984), 176.
[31]Wilson (1984), 180.
[32]Sarna, N.M., "Bible", *Encyclopaedia Judica* IV, 827.
[33]Sarna, N.M., "Bible", *Encyclopaedia Judica* IV, 827.

III	22:17-24:22	("The words of the wise")
IV	24:23-24	("Also words of the wise")
V	25-29	("These are also proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied")
VI	30	("The words of Agur"[and other sayings])
VII	31:1-9	("The words of Lemuel")
VIII	31:10-31	(an acrostichon about the virtuous woman)[34]

The sequence of the LXX can be described as follows, according to the sections and numbers of the MT:

I-III	1:1-24:1-22	
VI, part 1	30:1-14	("The words of Agur," first part)
IV	24:23-34	("Also words of the wise")
VI, part 2	30:15-33	("The words of Agur," second part)
VII	31:1-9	("The words of Lemuel," first part)
V	25-29	
VIII	31:10-31	(an acrostichon about the virtuous woman, formally representing "the words of Lemuel," second part)[35]

From this evidence, Tov observes that when Proverbs was translated into Greek, a scroll was used that contained an editorial stage of the book differing from the one now contained in the MT.[36] It is unlikely that at such an early stage the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes were edited together. Thus, there is no reason to read these two books together.

Fredericks suggests that since it is not easy to find the overall structure of Ecclesiastes, constructing the structure from the smaller units may reveal the general schema for the whole book.[37] Fredericks finds a chiastic arrangement in 5:9-6:9, by looking at twelve leitmotifs of the units, each being an *inclusio* and a substantive contribution to the meaning of the passage.[38] The general chiasm is of A-B-C/C-B-A form, with the break at the chapter division: A (5:9-11) = A' (6:7-9); B (5:12-16) = (6:3-6); C (5:17-19) = C' (6:1,2).[39] Fredericks also finds a straight parallel between 5:12-19 and 6:1-9, while 5:9-11 serves as the introduction to both of these parallel

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[34]Tov (1990), 53.
[35]Tov (1990), 54.
[36]Tov (1990), 55.
[37]Fredericks (1989), 17.
[38]Fredericks (1989), 18.
[39]Fredericks (1989), 18.

sections since it mentions those topics to be handled in the two subsequent progressions.[40] The parallel structure is as follows:

I. There Is an Evil	5:12a	6:1
A. Riches Possessed	5:12b	6:2a
B. Riches Lost	5:13a	6:2b
II. Begetting	5:13b	6:3a
A. Having Nothing	5:13c	6:3b
B. Coming and Going	5:14-15a	6:4-6
III. What Advantage from Toil?	5:15b	6:8, 7a
A. No Satisfaction	5:16	6:7b
B. Contentment	5:17-19	6:9[41]

These parallel sequences introduce the topic of those who were once rich, then emphasise the inevitable journey into and out of life. They raise again the question about the profit in human life with which the entire book begins. Both passages begin with the phrase "there is an evil" (יֵשׁ רָעָה), indicating that the following examples are negative. However, towards the end both seem to evoke a positive response, as indicated by the word טוֹב in 5:17 and 6:9. Murphy thinks that the parallelism breaks down at the point of contentment.[42] Fredericks, indeed, recognises the difficulty, for he points out that the latter passage is not as positive as the former one, since the passage has moved from the interests of the wealthy to all owners of any amount of property.[43]

The dual patterning of 5:9-6:9 along chiastic and parallel lines clearly points to an indivisible unit in this passage. It also suggests that Qoheleth cleverly planned its structure. Since Qoheleth used more than one means to structure this passage, it is likely that he used more than one method to structure the entire book. The parallel between 5:12-19 and 6:1-9 not only displays similar ideas, but also permits an examination of how those ideas are developed. There is an identical word (עשׁר) in 5:12 and 6:2, but it is qualified by different phrases. In 5:12b the wealth is preserved by its owners (עֹשְׁרֵ֖שֻׁמּוּר לִבְעָלָיו), whereas in 6:2a wealth is given by God himself (אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתֶּן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁר). The overall meaning of 5:12b-13a is the same as 6:2, but the wording of 6:2 is closer to 5:18.

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[40]Fredericks (1989), 28-29.
[41]Fredericks (1989), 29.
[42]Murphy (1992), 49.
[43]Fredericks (1989), 32.

5:18 גַּם כָּל־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁר וּנְכָסִים וְהִשְׁלִיטוֹ לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ
וְלָשֵׂאת אֶת־חֶלְקוֹ וְלִשְׂמַח בַּעֲמָלוֹ זֹה מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא׃

6:2 אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתֶּן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁר וּנְכָסִים וְכָבוֹד וְאֵינֶנּוּ חָסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ ו מִכֹּל
אֲשֶׁר־יִתְאַוֶּה וְלֹא־יַשְׁלִיטֶנּוּ הָאֱלֹהִים לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִישׁ נָכְרִי יֹאכְלֶנּוּ זֶה
הֶבֶל וְחֳלִי רָע הוּא׃

The main contrast between 6:2 and 5:18 is the use of the negative לֹא in front of the verb שׁלט. The other significant contrast is in the summary phrases of each verse: זֶה הֶבֶל וְחֳלִי רָע הוּא and זֹה מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא. In fact these two verses are part of the chiasm (C-C') shown by Fredericks.[44] However, the concluding idea of one passage can be developed to introduce a new passage. In 6:2, Qoheleth emphasises that it is not enough to just recognise that God gives wealth and possessions to every man. More than that, God has the sovereign power to allow or not allow one to enjoy his gift of great wealth. Some may think that great wealth is the sign of God's blessing or divine approval, but Qoheleth does not think so. Another possible interpretation is that a man once blessed by God may not receive the full blessing, for great wealth is only a part of God's blessing. The full blessing seems to be the ability to enjoy the wealth given by God.

The central idea of the parallel structure of 5:12-6:9 is that one should be content with what one has in the present (שִׂמְחָה 5:18, 19; מַרְאֵה עֵינַיִם, 6:9), rather than dwell on the past (זכר, 5:19) or wish for the future (מְהַלֶּךְ־נָפֶשׁ, 6:9).[45] It is possible that Qohelet structured his book by using the time-frame model of past-present-future. Fredericks does not clarify how the unit of 5:9-6:9 relates to the whole book, for he remarks that its unity "is seen by many commentators, who with different titles distinguish it clearly from the surrounding materials".[46] He agrees with Wright's thesis, that the extended הֶבֶל-clause in 6:9, which includes וּרְעוּת רוּחַ, is certainly climactic.[47] But Fredericks is not certain whether it closes as large a section as that beginning at 4:17.[48] In 5:9 the beginning of the section shows that the person who is greedy for money will never be satisfied. Murphy rightly remarks "Qohelet has already anticipated this notion in 1:8 (eyes not satisfied with seeing) and in 4:8 (eyes not satisfied by riches)".[49] Taking

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[44]Fredericks (1989), 19,26-28.
[45]Fredericks (1989), 32.
[46]Fredericks (1989), 18.
[47]Fredericks (1989), 34.
[48]Fredericks (1989), 34.
[49]Murphy (1992), 51.

these two verses into account with 5:9-6:9, it is possible to see the connection between this passage and the rest of the book which precedes it. 1:8 is a general observation, while 4:8 is a more specific observation. It seems 5:8 is closely connected to 4:8 lexically (money and riches), while 6:9 is closer to 1:8 (both use "eye" and "see" together). As a matter of fact these four verses are linked together by the same concern, satisfaction or lack of satisfaction. Though the word "satisfaction" is not used in 6:9, the word "eye" and "see" are used together. The second half of the first line of 6:9 (מֵהֲלֵךְ־נָפֶשׁ) may be rendered "departing from life",[50] meaning attaining satisfaction is better than death. The following diagram demonstrates the relationship.

	a	b	c	d
1:8	The eye	is not	satisfied with	seeing.
4:8	His eyes	are not	satisfied by	riches.
5:9	Who loves money	is not	satisfied with	money.
6:9	It is better	(to satisfy by)	seeing with	eyes than...

Each verse is divided into four units of meaning for the convenience of comparison. Units a, b, and c of 1:8 and 4:8 are almost identical. Units b, c, and d of 4:8 and 5:9 are almost identical. Units c and d of 6:9 are identical with units a and d of 1:8. 6:9 may serve as a temporary conclusion for the first half of the book, since it concludes with a positive remark. The Masoretes locate the midpoint of the book between verses 9 and 10 of this chapter. The full futility formula (גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ) occurs here for the last time.

Verse 10 probably begins a new section, the second half of the book. Since 7:1 clearly begins a series of sayings, 6:10-12 may be considered as the introduction to the second half.[51] However, it is not totally independent of the foregoing, since it returns to the idea that nothing new ever occurs, mentioned in 1:9. The idea of 1:9 is loosely linked to 1:8, similar to the relationship between 6:9 and 6:10. Gordis wonders whether this brief passage is an independent unit or the conclusion of the preceding section (5:9-6:9), and he chooses to regard it as an independent passage because verse 10 is not syntactically joined to verse 9.[52]

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[50]Cf. Whybray (1989), 109.
[51]Murphy (1992), 58.
[52]Gordis (1955), 252.

This unit contains three rhetorical questions:

1) What benefit is there for a man (6:11)?

2) Who knows what is good for a man in this life (6:12)?

3) Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun (6:12)?

Certainly, there is no answer or response to these questions found in this brief passage. Moreover, these questions cannot be answered within one verse. Another interpretation may be possible, when these questions are considered as the response to the remark in 6:10, by translating both the word כִּי before the second question and the word אֲשֶׁר before the third question as "for". Then the translation of 6:11-12 would be as follows:

> **For** when there are more words there is more meaninglessness, and what benefit is there for a man?
> **For** who knows what is good for a man in this life? A few days of his futile life and he passes through them like shadow.
> **For** who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

Whybray, however, argues that כִּי has an asseverative function here, and does not translate the word אֲשֶׁר, seeing no connection between verses 10 and 11, while seeing questions 2 and 3 as parallel.[53] Gordis also omits these two words in his translation.[54] Thus it is clear that these three questions seem to serve as introductions to the following sections. Placed together, these three questions seem to call for responses.

Superficially, 7:1-14 is a mere collection of proverbs, especially the "better sayings". However, Qohelet's thought pattern can be seen in this passage. The first half of 7:1 is a traditional proverb, but the second half of this verse and 7:2 are Qohelet's own language. The idea in 7:1b-2 is similar to 4:2. There are links of ideas among these verses: the day of death (7:1) with the house of mourning (7:2); the house of mourning (7:2,4) with grief (7:3); the house of feasting (7:2,4) with laughter (7:3, 6). He seems to use traditional proverbs to support his judgments. Previously, טוֹב (good) is used as a positive response to the question "What advantage...?" (5:17; 6:9). Possibly, 7:1-14 serve as the response to the first question (6:11), for verses 11 and 12 repeatedly use the same term "advantage" (יתר):

טוֹבָה חָכְמָה עִם־נַחֲלָה **וְיֹתֶר** לִרְאֵי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃
כִּי בְּצֵל הַחָכְמָה בְּצֵל הַכֶּסֶף **וְיִתְרוֹן** דַּעַת הַחָכְמָה תְּחַיֶּה בְּעָלֶיהָ׃

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[53]Whybray (1989), 110-111.
[54]Gordis (1955), 162.

These two verses (7:11-12) link wisdom with inheritance and money. Here wisdom is regarded as something beneficial in life, and gives life to those who possess it. This emphasis on the restriction of wisdom for the living infers that some of Qohelet's contemporaries might believe that wisdom was useful beyond death or at least a help in understanding life after death.

The response to the second question perhaps occurs in 7:25-8:5, especially 7:25; 8:1; 8:5. The wise man knows the meaning of an incident and the time and procedure.

Finally the response to the third question may appear in 8:6-8. There is a time when misfortune may befall a man, but it is unlikely that he knows when it will happen, for nobody can inform him about the future.

Another connection between 6:10-12 and the rest of the book can be based on the repeated idea of God's omnipotence. God is superior; man is inferior. Man cannot contend with God (6:10), nor change the situation which is predestined (7:13), nor understand the work of God (8:16).

Apart from chiasm and parallelism, Qohelet used another literary structure–numerical sayings. Ogden recognises that Qohelet used numerical statements to summarise his conclusions in 4:1-12.[55] However, Murphy recognises the number "two", as the key word for the structure of 4:7-16.[56] Ogden identifies three introductory observations (vv. 1, 4, 7), and three conclusions, using the better sayings and numerical sets (vv. 3, 6, 9).[57] Thus, this passage can be divided into four sub-sections. The fourth sub-section, introduced by כִּי, has three conditional clauses each of which supports the validity of the conclusions expressed in the better sayings.[58] Ogden structures this passage as follows:

4.1	Again I saw...	Observation A
4.3	Better than both is...	Conclusion A
4.4	Then I saw...	Observation B
4.6	Better is one handful...	Conclusion B
4.7	Again I saw...	Observation C
4.9	Two are better than one...	Conclusion C
4.10	For if they fall, one will...	Condition 1
4.11	Again, if two lie together...	Condition 2
4.12a	And, if one man...	Condition 3
4.12b	A three-fold cord...	Final conclusion[59]

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[55]Ogden (1984), 446.

[56]Murphy (1992), 41. In 4:15, there is a Hebrew word הַשֵּׁנִי which means "the second". Many translators omit this word.

[57]Ogden (1984), 446-447.

[58]Ogden (1984), 446-447.

[59]Ogden (1987), 66.

This passage seems to be a complete unit, but if it is carefully investigated, links between the previous passage and the following passage can be found. 4:1-3 has the same concerns as 3:16-22, namely, the injustice and the meaning of life. On the other hand, 4:4-6 and 4:7-9 have something in common, for both sections express concern about the product of work, but do not express concern about the injustice. In the fourth sub-section (4:10-12), Qohelet demonstrates the benefit of having a companion by giving three pairs of illustration. Number three (triple cord) in the final illustration (4:12b) underscores the conclusions of each sub-section. If the oppressed in 4:1 had had someone to comfort him, he would have been better than the dead. If the man in 4:4 did not work just to compete with his neighbour, he would have had his two hands full in peace. In the same way, if the man in 4:8 had a friend working with him, his labour would be purposeful. It would be more purposeful if he had a son or a brother with whom he could share his wealth.

Later, in 9:9, Qohelet gives positive advice to an exclusively male audience, to enjoy life with a woman or a wife whom one loves. Crenshaw points out that the oriental *Ketib* has הִיא for הוּא, indicating the possibility of identifying the woman as one's portion in life.[60] Conversely, arguing for the meaning of עָמָל as "toil" instead of "wealth", Fox explains "enjoying life with one's wife is not a portion a man has in his wealth, but it is one that accompanies him during life's activities in general."[61] In this context, Qohelet seems to acknowledge that having a wife may help a man ease the pressure from his toil if he pays attention to her, instead of spending all his life working like the man in 4:8. Occasionally, Qohelet returns to the themes which appeared negatively in the first half of the book, by adding the answers to resolve the problem of the futility of life. It is quite possible that Qohelet began his first part by emphasising the negative aspect to arouse his audience, and later in the second half provided more positive advice for beneficial living in the midst of unpleasant circumstances. In the first half, there are negative things that none can avoid, such as toil (3:9-11), death (3:18-21), and injustice (5:7), but there are also things done by some people, not aware of their futility, such as working to compete with others (4:4), and working for the purpose of riches (4:8). In the second half, admitting that evil things and death are unavoidable (9:3, and 9:12), there are positive things anyone can choose to do (9:10). Thus the second half tends to be more positive than the first half.

The structure proposed by Ogden seems clearer than that proposed by Murphy. However, both of them may misunderstand Qohelet or may grasp only one aspect of

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[60]Crenshaw (1987), 163.
[61]Fox (1989), 259.

the literary techniques used by Qohelet. Combining both proposals, it is possible to see that 4:4-12 is a truly complete unit judging from its content and its literary structure. While 4:1-3 is connected to 4:4-12 by its literary structure but not its content, 4:13-16 is connected to 4:4-12 by the number "two" (שני). Qohelet does use several such linking techiques.

Wright puts a heavy emphasis on the structure as a key to exegesis, for he states that "The book can be made to say many different things depending upon how one divides it into units, as the history of its interpretation illustrates."[62] Wright claims to recover the structure of the book:

> Fortunately the author has marked the ends of sections with refrains ("vanity and a chase after wind" in chaps. 1-6; "find" in chaps.7-8; "not know" in chaps.9-11). That this simple structural device is indeed the key to the book's units is amply proved by the extensive numerical design discoverable in the verse count of the resulting major and minor sections. Thus, the refrains indicate that the whole book is to be divided into two parts (1:1-6:9; 6:10-12:14); each part contains 111 verses. The refrains indicate that the body of the book is in two parts (2:1-6:9 and 6:10-11:6); each part contains 93 verses. These 186 verses are flanked by an 18-verse introduction (1:1-18) and an 18-verse conclusion (11:7-12:14). The numbers 18, 93 ,111, 186, 222 are all related to the number 37 (the numerical value of *hebel*,"vanity," which itself occurs 37 times in the book). In addition, and most important, the assorted and varying verse quantities of the smaller units as indicated by the refrains are not random numbers but are in a fixed pattern, for the numbers have been systematically assigned to each of those units. Finally, Qoheleth's book (1:1-12:8, minus the epilogue) contains 216 verses, corresponding to the numerical value of the book's inclusio (cf. comment on 1:2), a further indication, if any is needed, that the author is engaged in numerical composition.[63]

Murphy agrees with Wright's analysis and supports Wright's method:

> The value of Wright's structural analysis is that it follows the lead of clear repetitions of key phrases within the book. Moreover, the subsections are strictly limited by these repetitions; they are not the result of conceptual or logical analysis, but neither do they sin against logic; as conceptual divisions they are at least adequate.[64]

And after quoting the observations given by Wright[65], Murphy is more convinced by Wright's analysis:

> While numerical patterns are usually associated with arbitrary flights of fantasy, it should be noted that the above observations are relatively sober, and deal with key phrases and verses. Second, the likelihood that the verbal and numerical patterns are merely coincidental is minimal, since the observations reinforce each other. Third, the numerical patterns are in a different line of reasoning altogether from the literary analysis indicated by the repetition of key phrases in many instances, and yet they

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[62]Wright, (1989), 489.

[63]Wright, (1989), 489. For the details, see Wright, *CBQ* 30 (1968), 313-334; 42 (1980), 38-51; 45 (1983), 32-43.

[64]Murphy (1992), xxxviii.

[65]Wright, (1983), 32-43.

> lend confirmation to it. Finally, this formal structural analysis, whatever imperfections it may have, is in general harmony with many logical analyses of the book.[66]

Thus Murphy's previous work[67] and his commentary follow the main structural pattern discovered by Wright.[68] However, Murphy's headings for each section are different from Wright's headings. Most of the headings given by Murphy begin with the word "reflection", especially in the first part of the book; in the second part collections of sayings and instructions are added. Though Wright's structural analysis is objective, it cannot prevent anyone from reading each small unit subjectively, because recognising the numerical composition does not help us to know the meaning of each unit. If we follow this analysis we will see some clues about the quantity of the materials (number of verses in each section), but we will not see the linking of sections. Wright pays attention only to the three repeated phrases or words as the markers of the ends of sections. However, there are more than three repeated phrases in the book. There are countless repetitions of such phrases as: "under the sun", "eat and drink", "who knows", "this is also futility", etc. These phrases can be markers for the beginnings of sections as well as the ends of sections. Wright tends to focus on one system of structuring the book and fails to see the possibility of overlapping between sections, and the interactions between sections. The full futility formula is used for the last time at 6:9, but the shorter formula continues to be used in the second half of the book. The differences of opinion in interpreting Ecclesiastes do not depend on the structure of the book alone. The different interpretations normally derive from the meanings of some Hebrew words and the background of the interpreters. For example the word אִשָּׁה in 9:9 is translated by some interpretors as "a woman" and as "a wife" by the others. A concern with morality may affect this point of translation, or it may reflect a cultural bias on the part of the translator.

The three refrains used by Wright tend to emphasise the negative side of human life. Wright deliberately omits the other refrains. For example the refrain that recommends enjoying life is used repeatedly throughout the entire book, appearing in 2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:17-18; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:8. This refrain is likely to be used as a lead-in toward the climax of the book, since it becomes the introduction of the section advising youth (11:9). It seems probable that Qohelet wants to remind those who are so focused on their work that their chance to enjoy life is passing them by. For those who are

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[66]Murphy (1992), xxxix.
[67]Murphy (1981), 128-129.
[68]Murphy (1992), xxxix-xli.

young, Qohelet cautions that they should enjoy life as much as they can before their chance passes, because death is approaching.

Despite its shortcomings, the numerical pattern helps us to see that Qohelet had planned and restricted the shape and the size of his work before he wrote it. It is likely that Qohelet tried to limit his materials to discuss one big issue, namely the futility of life. There are several topics related to this issue, resulting in the repetition of many key words. The repeated terms constitute about one-fifth of all the words in the book (from 1:4 to 12:7).[69]

Brown follows Wright's basic thesis and outline of the book; but instead of focusing upon refrains, Brown focuses upon the cluster of words and ideas at parallel positions in adjoining and complementary passages.[70] He sees that there are parallels between the first and the second half of the book:

> Each half begins with an introduction of similar length (1:1-11; 6:10-7:12), followed by sections of 32 and 34 vv. respectively, which conclude with the exhortation to enjoy life (1:13-2:26; 7:13-8:17). Some parallels often occur on (nearly) the same line number of each half, like the introductory proverb about not straightening what God has bent (1:15; 7:13) and the pivotal verses in the middle of each section where the author decides to pursue a wise solution (2:12; 7:25). The introductory comments of each half include the admonition to 'see' or 'consider' in terms of what is 'good' (2:1; 7:13-14). Other parallels include the author's determination to 'test' what is good (2:1, with pleasurable experiences; 7:23, with wisdom) with adjoining verbs in the first person (2:1ff.; 7:23ff.), followed by disappointing results characterized as 'futile' (2:15-22; 8:10, 14) and a reference to 'the hand of God' (2:24; 9:1).
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> The centre pieces of each half of the book (3:1-22; 9:1-12) occur in the exact centre of each half, containing 22 and 12 vv. respectively. The inclusio 'sons of men' begins and ends these sections, again at (nearly) the same point (3:10//9:3; 3:19//9:12 occur at the sixty-first lines). The fifty-sixth line (or centre verse) of each half again advocates the enjoyment of life under God (3:12; 9:7). The sovereign presence of God dominates both passages, occuring eight times in 3:10-18 and heading each half of 9:1-12 (9:1, 7). Other parallels, showing the close correspondence of chs. 3 and 9:1-12, include the predominance of the words 'all' (3:11, 14, 19-20; 9:1-4, 6, 8-11), 'fate' (3:19; 9:2), 'time' (3:1-8, 11, 17; 9:8, 11-12), 'share/lot' (3:22; 9:6), and the allusion to (3:20) and mention of Sheol (9:10). Note also the death of animals in 3:18-19 and 9:4 and the words 'love' and 'hate' in both 3:8 and 9:1.
>
> The final sections of each half (4:1-6:9; 9:13-12:14) contain 45 and 50 vv. respectively... The admonition to enjoy life again occurs as a conclusion at the thirty-fourth line of each section (5:18; 11:9) as in the first parallel sections above (1:12-2:26; 7:13-8:17). Other parallels include the references to a king just before (4:13ff.//9:14ff.) and after (5:9//10:16ff.) centre paragraphs (5:1-7; 10:2-3), the poor wise man (4:13; 9:15-16), 'many words' (5:3, 7; 10:12, 14), the fool's lack of knowledge (5:1; 10:15), the fool's words (5:3; 10:12-14), the word 'mistake' (5:6; 10:5), the word 'land' (5:9; 10:16-17), the mention of sleep with rich men (5:12; 10:20), the word 'sweet' (5:12; 11:7), the phrase 'an evil I've seen' (5:13; 10:5), the conjunction of 'days', 'darkness', 'vexation' and 'many' (5:17, 20; 11:8-10), the verbs

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[69]Murphy (1981), 128-130.

[70]Brown (1990), 196.

> 'remember' and 'rejoice' (5:19-20; 11:8), the use of one's 'eyes' (6:9; 11:9), and perhaps the conjunction of 'more' with 'wise man' (6:8; 12:9).[71]

It can be agreed that the parallels between these sections suggest there is an intended interplay between the halves of the book. However, the interaction between parallel passages is on a large scale, and not necessarily in detail. For example 5:8(9) has the word אֶרֶץ (land or country) corresponding to the occurrences in 10:16-17. The meaning of 5:8 is obscure, for we do not know whether a king distributed profit from the cultivated field to everyone. It probably means that a king is served by a field, or a king causes a field to be tilled. On the other hand the meaning of 10:16-17 is quite clear. A country with a ruler who is inexperienced and irresponsible is cursed, while a country with a ruler who belongs to nobility by birth and exercises self-control is blessed. It is not clear which type of king 5:8 refers to. The main points of 5:11(12) and 10:20 are different, though both mention the riches and sleep (bedroom). Sound sleep is the main concern of 5:11 (12), while 10:20 gives a warning not to speak negatively about the rich.

Though the parallels are obviously not precise, they seem to suggest the development of ideas from the same concerns. In 5:16 (17), Qohelet points out that one who toils is unable to enjoy life, while in 11:8, he advises that one should enjoy life as much as possible, admitting that unpleasant days predominate. Possibly, the message of the first half of the book is concerned with those who are not aware that death is imminent. They work so hard and think that they will have time to enjoy life. In that regard, the second half gives more affirmative advice about enjoying life.[72] The mistaken assumptions of those in the first half should provide a lesson to the later generation or to the persons who have the opportunity to enjoy life before it is too late.

In addition to the many instances of linking between the two halves of the book, Brown also sees that the same phenomenon occurs within each half of 111 verses, between the quarters of each half.[73] He points out four chiasmi:

> Just as the central teachings on each half can be found exactly in the middle verses of each half (3:12; 9:7), the middle verses of each quarter of the book (2:10-11, 5:2-3, 7:25-26, and 10:17-18) serve as thematic centres in the 32 or 34 verse passages compared above, which (we will see) are chiastic. The only exception is 10:17-18, which is located in the conclusion of the fourth and as chiasmus.[74]

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[71]Brown (1990), 198-199.

[72]See the imperative at the beginning of 9:7 and 11:9.

[73]Brown (1990), 199.

[74]Brown (1990), 199.

Brown does not spell out the chiasmus of the first quarter. He divides the second quarter into two parallel parts (4:1-16; 5:8-6:9), separated by a centre passage (5:1-7), which is also divided into two halves (5:1-3; 5:4-7).[75] He observes that its final verse (5:7), the middle verse of the second quarter, contains the command to fear God, also central to the first half of the book (3:14) as well as the second half where it serves as an *inclusio* for the third quarter (7:18; 8:12-13) and a conclusion for the whole book (12:14).[76] He also divides 4:1-16 and 5:8-6:9 into two halves.[77]

The clues that Brown uses for separating 4:1-16 into two parts are the introductory phrase "then I looked again" (4:1, 7), the refrain "striving after wind" (4:6, 16), and the *inclusio* "there is no end" (4:8, 16), with the development from the advantage of one (vv. 1-6) to the advantage of two (vv. 7-16), or from the advantage of having no enemy to the advantage of having a companion.[78] If Ogden's division (4:1-12), and Murphy's division (3:1-4:6; 4:7-16) are compared to Brown's division (4:1-16), it is clear that each of them pays attention to different literary indicators. Ogden emphasises the conclusions and the numbers, but he fails to see the number "two" in 4:13-16. Murphy emphasises the number "two" alone and fails to see the connection of the previous passage (4:1-6). Brown seems to give a fuller picture, but he fails to see the smaller conclusions which build up to the centre paragraph [4:17 (5:1)-5:6 (7)].

Brown sees that the entire third quarter (7:13-8:17) is clearly chiastic by setting off the centrepiece of 7:25-29; the three sections of chapter 8 correspond inversely to the three sections of 7:13-24:

7:13-14 A	Man cannot discover the work of God (with exhortation)
7:15-18 B	Fear God despite the prosperity of the wicked
7:19-24 C	The vicissitudes of the wise
7:25-29 D	Man cannot discover an explanation
8:1-9 C'	The vicissitudes of the wise
8:10-14 B'	Fear God despite the prosperity of the wicked
8:15-17 A'	Man cannot discover the work of God (with exhortation)[79]

The key word for this quarter is the Hebrew term מצא which occurs twelve times. It occurs seven times in the middle section (7:26-29), three times in the concluding verse (8:17), and one time in the beginning section (7:14). This evidence suggests that the middle section is the focus of this quarter. Moreover, the Hebrew word חֶשְׁבּוֹן (which is not easy to translate in this context) frames this paragraph in verse 25 and 29 and also

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[75]Brown (1990), 200.
[76]Brown (1990), 200.
[77]Brown (1990), 200-201.
[78]Brown (1990), 200-201.
[79]Brown (1990), 203.

occurs in the centre of this paragraph (v.27). The semantic field of this word is quite broad. It can mean "reckoning", "sum of things" or "device". The meaning of this word in the first occurrence seems to be "sum of knowledge", since it is used with חָכְמָה (wisdom). The meaning of the second occurence is obscure. Instead of giving the definite result: one plus one equals two, Qohelet gives the result as חֶשְׁבּוֹן. Murphy translates this word as "answer".[80] But we still do not know exactly what the answer is. Therefore it should be broadly translated as "sum". The meaning of the third occurence is clearer, since it is contrasted with the word יָשָׁר (straight, upright). It should mean "devices" or "scheme". In 2 Ch. 26:15, the only other use of this noun, it signifies devices for use in warfare. Qohelet may play on this word to underscore the limitation of the human ability to find enlightenment. The more effort humans put into solving the problem, the more problems they encounter. This paragraph is also concerned with moral issues, therefore 7:29 probably means that human beings have brought death into the world by seeking the devices of war to kill each other, though God created them to be ethical.

Though this paragraph is the focal point of the third quarter, it needs other parts of the quarter to clarify its meaning. From the introductory section (7:13-14) and the concluding section (8:15-17), Qohelet points out that no one is able to understand the work of God. Human beings have no power to change a situation which God has foreordained. There are real situations that nobody can explain: the righteous person perishes in his righteousness, and the wicked person lives long in his wickedness (7:15), or the righteous person gets what the wicked person should get (8:14). Therefore one should live according to the appropriate situation (7:14) or accept all circumstances by enjoying life in spite of the seeming unfairness (8:15). In the introductory section (7:13-14) the exhortation is given prior to consideration of the unfair situations. In the concluding section (8:15-17) the exhortation is given after describing the unfair situations. Qohelet's alternative ways of presenting his thoughts point to the difficulty of pinpointing the beginning or the end of sections. The order of Qohelet's ideas are not nearly as important as the ideas themselves. It is not necessary to understand everything God does in this world before one can live happily.

So it is difficult to analyse the complete structure of Ecclesiastes. Some scholars agree on the divisions of the large portions of the book, but when it is divided into smaller portions, they disagree. However, from the evidence presented by several scholars, however imperfect, we can conclude that Qohelet had planned and organised his materials in advance. The epilogist suggests that Qohelet chose the right words

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[80]Murphy(1992), 74.

with great care. Qohelet uses several techniques to structure his book. Among his favourite techniques are *inclusio*, chiasm, use of parallel materials, introductory phrases, and refrains. Moreover Qoheleth seems to use more than one structuring principle; this is evident from the fact that there is more than one way to identify certain divisions of the book. Some divisions seem to be isolated from other parts of the book, but they are joined with the rest by interlaced words or phrases.

From the repeated words or phrases and the refrains together with parallel positions of ideas, we can conclude that Qohelet has specific concerns. His exhortations mostly derive from his observations implying that he intends to offer people the knowledge that is applicable to life situations. Several sayings from the wisdom tradition are outdated and cannot be applied to the situations faced by Qohelet's contemporaries. Thus Qohelet reminds people of the inadequacy of both the wisdom tradition and their own personal reflections. His positive advice is given to those who have the opportunity to choose the way they want to live under divine approval. The aim of the book is to point out that human beings can live a satisfactory life in this futile world only in light of the wisdom provided by God.

Chapter Six

Key Words

It is obvious that Qohelet prefers to use some words quite often. The repetition of words is intentional rather than inadvertent. Some of these words are common words and can be replaced by synonyms. Some of them have more than one English equivalent. To understand Qohelet's thought we need to consider the ways they are used by him. Watson suggests, "The main function of key words is *to express the principal theme of a poem*".[1] It is likely that some of the key words in this chapter will provide some essential information for interpretation of this book. Murphy lists the favourite words found in Ecclesiastes 1:4-12:7, whether occuring as verbs or in related forms:

עשׂה	do (62)
חכם	wise (51)
טוב	good (51)
ראה	see (46)
עת	time (37)
שׁמשׁ	sun (33)
עמל	trouble (33)
רעה	evil (30)
הבל	vanity (29, in all 38)[2]
כסיל	fool (18)
שׂמח	joy (17)
אכל	eat (15)
ישׁ	there is (15)
יתר	profit (15)
סכל	fool (13)
רוח	wind (as parallel to *hbl*) (13)
מות	die (13)
רשׁע	wrongdoing (12)
צדק	just (11)
ענה	trouble (10)

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[1]Watson (1984), 288.

[2]It is not clear what Murphy tries to point out from the figure 29. He may refer to the number of times that הבל means vanity. It is obvious that the figure 38 refers to the total occurrences of הבל in the whole book.

רעות /רעיון	chase (10)
שלט	power (9)
זכר	remember (8)
חלק	portion (8)
כעס	vexation (7)
חפץ	affair (7)
חלל	folly (7)
כשר	succeed (5)[3]

At least two other significant words, ידע (know) and מצא (find), should be added to this list. Evidently, some words are related such as כסיל, סכל, and חלל, and can be grouped together. Moreover, Murphy gives only one familiar meaning to each Hebrew word. Some of these words should be carefully investigated, for they have special meanings as used in Ecclesiastes. This chapter will deal with those words that are relevant to the understanding of Qohelet's teaching, especially those which relate to main concepts of Theravāda Buddhism.

The Usage of הבל in Ecclesiastes

The first one to be investigated is הבל. This word is quite significant for this book, for it is used as its motto; הֶבֶל הֲבָלִים. Many modern scholars still struggle to comprehend the meaning of this word.[4] Fox recognises that no one English word corresponds exactly to the semantic field of this root as Qohelet uses it.[5] However, he suggests that the best translation equivalent to the root הבל in Qohelet's usage is "absurd, absurdity".[6] Michel agrees with Fox, for he says, "Ich schlage deshalb vor, הבל in den Erörterungen Qohelets durch „absurd" im Sinne von „sinnlos" wiederzugeben".[7] Crenshaw suggests that הבל in Ecclesiastes shows two nuances: temporal ("ephemerality") and existential ("futility" or "absurdity").[8] Eaton points out that the meanings of הבל include (i) brevity and unsubstantiality, emptiness; (ii) unreliability, frailty; (iii) futility; (iv) deceit.[9] Ogden emphasises that this term in Ecclesiastes has a distinctive function and meaning. It conveys the notion that life is

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[3]Murphy, (1992), xxix. See also Lauha A., (1978), 9.
[4]McKenna (1992), 19.
[5]Fox (1986), 407.
[6]Fox (1986), 407. According to him, the essence of the absurd is a disparity between two terms that are supposed to be joined by a link of harmony or causality but are, in fact, disjunct. It is an affront to reason, in the broad sense of the human faculty that looks for order in the world about us.
[7]Michel (1989), 44.
[8]Crenshaw (1987), 57. See also Gordis (1955), 195.
[9]Eaton (1983), 56.

enigmatic, and mysterious.[10] Apart from these meanings, Good argues that הבל means "incongruous", a sense close to "irony" or "ironic".[11] Polk follows Good, by suggesting that we should see in הבל not simply a negative meaning, but an ironic one whose ultimate significance is positive and life-affirming.[12] After observing these alternatives, Murphy chooses to follow the traditional translation by rendering הבל as "vanity", while admitting that it is certainly not the best rendering. Yet he sees that no one English word expresses all the nuances that Qohelet could attach to הבל.[13]

Unlike their modern counterparts, scholars in the past seemed to have no difficulty in understanding the meaning of הבל. Barton translated this root as "vanity", and gives the range of meanings as "breath", "vapor", and then "nothingness", "vanity".[14] Henry and Scott translated this root as "vanity" and did not explain its meaning, although they saw the need to explain the meaning of "Qohelet".[15] Rashbam, in his commentary, did not give the meaning of הבל, but he only explained the text with the same word הבל.[16] This evidence suggests that medieval Jewish readers did not have difficulty in understanding the term, which implies its meaning had remained stable for a long time. The Septuagint consistently translates הבל by one Greek word ματαιότης which means "emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness". Though in the past this term was well understood by most people, many present day scholars are not certain about its meaning. Therefore it is necessary to consider all the nuances of הבל which Qohelet uses.

The root הבל occurs in the Old Testament about 78 times. In most cases, it appears as a noun. The verb is denominative and is quite rare in the Hebrew Bible; we find it only five times (2 Kgs. 17:5; Jer. 2:5; 23:16; Job 27:12; Ps. 62:11). Seybold points out that הבל is in all probability a special onomatopoeic word formation in Hebrew, because of its constellation of consonants and weak vowels, and the absence of a common Semitic primary verbal root.[17] There are three occasions where the verb and the noun are used together (2 Kgs. 17:15 = Jer. 2:5; Job 27:12).

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[10]Ogden (1987), 22.
[11]Good (1965), 176-183.
[12]Polk (1976), 7.
[13]Murphy (1992), lix.
[14]Barton (1908), 69.
[15]Henry and Scott (1799), 473-474. They explain that "Qohelet" comes from a word which signifies "to gather".
[16]Japhet and Salters (1985), 90-91, 110-111, 124-125, etc. See also Rashi and Ibn Ezra in the Rabbinic Bible.
[17]Seybold, "hebhel", *TDOT*, III, 314.

וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֶבֶל וַיֶּהְבָּלוּ וְאַחֲרֵי הַגּוֹיִם

They went after a worthless thing and they became worthless, and they followed the nations ... (2 Kgs. 17:15).

כֹּה ו אָמַר יְהוָה מַה־מָּצְאוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם בִּי עָוֶל כִּי רָחֲקוּ מֵעָלָי וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֶבֶל וַיֶּהְבָּלוּ׃

Thus says the Lord: "What wrong did your fathers find in me, that they were remote from me, and went after a worthless thing, and became worthless?" (Jer. 2:5).

הֵן־אַתֶּם כֻּלְּכֶם חֲזִיתֶם וְלָמָּה־זֶּה הֶבֶל תֶּהְבָּלוּ׃

If all of you have seen it, why then do you (talk such) empty nonsense? (Job 27:12).

It is very difficult to translate these passages, because there is a play on words. The meaning of the noun is clear, but the meaning of the verb is not so clear. Perhaps the meaning of the verb should follow the meaning of the noun. From the context, the noun in 2 Kgs. 17:15 and Jer. 2:5 obviously refers to an idol. The verb, then, probably conveys the characteristic of an idol. In other words, the persons who worship an idol will be like idols. The context of Job 27:12 is quite different. It refers to speech, because this is a part of the dialogue between Job and his friends. The noun refers to the quality of their speeches, while the verb refers to the way they speak. Although these three passages may just play on words, the way the noun and the verb of the same root are put together seems to suggest that this root carries a strong enough connotation that the recipients can grasp its meaning without further explanation.

This root occurs in Ecclesiastes alone 38 times.[18] That means 48.71% of its usage in the Hebrew Bible is in Ecclesiastes, though this book has only 12 chapters. Thus the term is frequently used by Qohelet. However, he never uses this root in the verb form.

Outside Ecclesiastes, this word usually occurs in poetry. Only a very few times does it occur in prose. It often seems to be used metaphorically. We need to understand the overall context of the text before we can know the meaning of this word. Since it is used in Hebrew poetry, we can find a clue to its meaning when we know the parallel word.

הבל appears in Wisdom Literature several times. In Job, this root is often used by Job himself. Only once is it used by Elihu to accuse Job (35:16). Job uses this root to express his suffering (7:16; 9:29), and to complain about his friend's conduct

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[18]Septuagint has 39 occurrences, because in 9:2, the Septuagint shows that the word הַכֹּל should be replaced by the word הֶבֶל.

toward him (21:34; 27:12). The word is used in two senses: a meaningless word (nonsense), and the meaningless life.

מָאַסְתִּי לֹא־לְעֹלָם אֶחְיֶה חֲדַל מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־הֶבֶל יָמָי׃
I am in despair, I would not live forever; leave me alone, for my days are meaningless (or like vapour)[Job 7:16].

אָנֹכִי אֶרְשָׁע לָמָּה־זֶּה הֶבֶל אִיגָע׃
Since I am already found guilty, why should I struggle in vain? (Job 9:29).

וְאֵיךְ תְּנַחֲמוּנִי הֶבֶל וּתְשׁוּבֹתֵיכֶם נִשְׁאַר־מָעַל׃
So how can you console me with nonsense? And your answers are left with falsehood (Job 21:34).

הֵן־אַתֶּם כֻּלְּכֶם חֲזִיתֶם וְלָמָּה־זֶּה הֶבֶל תֶּהְבָּלוּ׃
If all of you have seen it, why then do you (talk such) empty nonsense? (Job 27:12).

Job 7:16 is part of a bitter complaint Job makes toward God. Prior to this verse, Job compares human life to a weaver's shuttle (7:6), a breath (רוּחַ 7:7) and a cloud (7:9). All these metaphors refer to the swiftness of human life. Even in the shortness of life, Job finds himself utterly miserable, because he feels that he is attacked by God. He wants to rest, but he cannot find peace because God uses visions and dreams to disturb him. Therefore he asks God to leave him alone, because he experiences the feeling that his life has no meaning if God keeps accusing him of doing wrong. In 9:29, Job complains that the defence of his innocence is useless, because God has declared him guilty. Job uses the word הֶבֶל to describe his fruitless attempts to clear himself of all the misery he is facing. From Job's point of view, his life is so futile because God does not show him mercy.

Not only is Job's life futile because of the way God deals with him, his life is even more miserable because the speeches of his friends are meaningless (21:34). Job complains that though all his friends have seen his righteousness (27:1-6), they still accuse him with meaningless words (27:12). That is, their accusations have no ground and do not help him at all.

הבל is used in the book of Proverbs only three times (13:11; 21:6; 31:30), always in a bad sense. Two times it is used together with שֶׁקֶר which usually means "lie". In these three passages, the context shows us that there are three things we cannot trust: the wealth which derives from dishonest business (13:11), the lying tongue (21:6), and the beauty of women (31:30, cf. Eccl. 11:10). In all these instances, הבל is used as the opposite of something that is true and long-lasting. This is very close to the meaning in Ecclesiastes.

הבל appears in Psalms ten times. The root occurs mostly in lament psalms (31, 39, 94), wisdom psalms (78, 144), and a psalm of trust (62). The psalmist often uses this root to explain his desperate situation (39:6) or to describe the unpredictability of human experience (39:7, 12; 62:10; 78:33; 144:4). Mankind cannot be compared with God, because he knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a puff of wind (94:11).

If we consider the characteristic parallelism of Hebrew poetry, then we find that this word is in the same semantic field as several related Hebrew words. In Ps. 78:33, it is parallel with בהל which can mean "terror, calamity". In Ps. 144:4, it is parallel with צֵל which means "shadow". In Ps. 39:6, it is parallel with טֶפַח which means "handbreadth", that is, a short measure, and parallel with אַיִן which means "nothing". In Ps. 39:7, it is parallel with צֶלֶם which means "image" or "phantom" (according to one modern translation).[19] In Ps. 39:6 הבל is not only in the same semantic field with טֶפַח and אַיִן but also is used in the refrain אַךְ כָּל־הֶבֶל כָּל־אָדָם נִצָּב. This phrase occurs again in 39:12, though two words are omitted: כָּל and נִצָּב. In Ps. 62:10, it is parallel with כָּזָב which means "lie". In Ps. 31:7 הבל is used in a construct chain with שׁוא which means "emptiness, vanity, emptiness of speech and worthlessness". This construct chain (הַבְלֵי־שָׁוְא) seems to form an absolute superlative.[20] Therefore it can be translated as "vanities of nothingness" or "worthless vanities".[21] Moreover this construct chain is used antithetically to יְהוָה. Therefore both הבל and שׁוא can mean "idol".[22] The word הֶבֶל is frequently used in this sense by Jeremiah or at least it is used in the contexts of describing idol worship or characteristics of idols (Jer. 2:5; 8:19; 10:3, 8, 15; 14:22; 16:19; 23:16; 51:18). In Jer. 10:14, the idols created by goldsmiths are described as having no life-breath in them, that is no essence in them. Then in 10:15 they are described as worthless (הֶבֶל). Thus הֶבֶל becomes the symbol of an idol. Hence Jeremiah is able to play on words in Jer. 2:5 when he says וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֶבֶל וַיֶּהְבָּלוּ. The noun הֶבֶל refers to an idol, while the verb refers to the situation of those who worship idols that they will become worthless like idols. This meaning is also found in Deuteronomy (32:21), 1 Kings (16:13, 26) and Jonah (2:9).

From the evidence of Hebrew poetry, it seems that הבל has a wide semantic field, which overlaps those of בהל, צֵל, טֶפַח, אַיִן, כָּזָב and שׁוא, to a greater or lesser degree as shown by the diagram below.[23]

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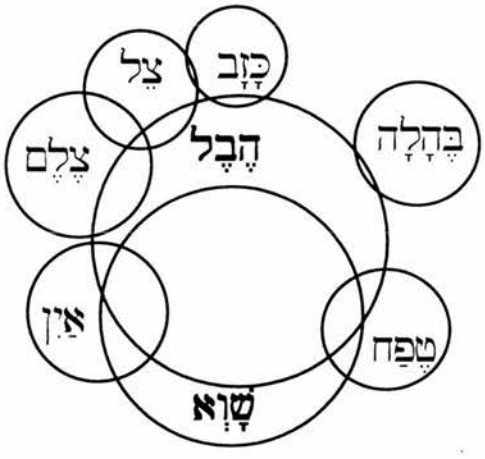
[19]See NEB. Ps.39:7 in Hebrew = 39:6 in English.

[20]Waltke and O'Connor (1990), 267.

[21]See also Jonah 2:9.

[22]The word שׁוא clearly means "idol" in Jer. 18:15.

[23]This diagram does not claim to represent exactly the level of semantic overlap between the different terms, but it does give a rough picture of such overlap.



In Zec. 10:2, it does not mean "idol", but it is used in a context that describes an idol. It is used in parallel with three Hebrew words: אָוֶן which means "deceit, trouble, sorrow, wickedness, iniquity and idolatry"; שֶׁקֶר which means "lie, deception, disappointment, falsefood, deceit, fraud and wrong"; and שָׁוְא which can mean "emptiness, vanity, emptiness of speech and worthlessness".

כִּי הַתְּרָפִים דִּבְּרוּ־אָוֶן וְהַקּוֹסְמִים חָזוּ שֶׁקֶר
וַחֲלֹמוֹת הַשָּׁוְא יְדַבֵּרוּ הֶבֶל יְנַחֵמוּן
עַל־כֵּן נָסְעוּ כְמוֹ־צֹאן יַעֻנּוּ כִּי־אֵין רֹעֶה׃

In this verse, הבל also exhibits wide semantic connections. Its meaning overlaps with those of אָוֶן, שֶׁקֶר and שָׁוְא.[24] From the context of this verse, it is obvious that all of these words represent something that is not true, though each word carries its own nuance. The evidence can be depicted in the form of a diagram indicating the breadth of the semantic field of הבל and its main synonyms.[25]

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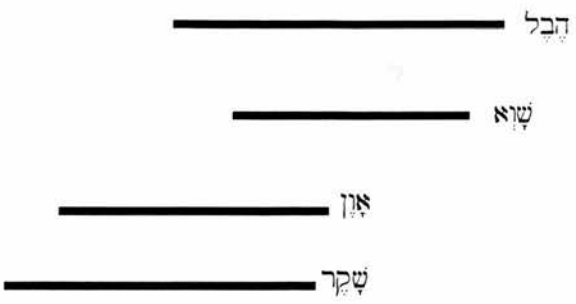
[24]Fox [(1989), 29] suggestes that הבל can be used as a synonym of these words and means "deceit, lie".

[25]This diagram also does not claim to represent exactly the level of semantice overlap between the different terms; but does give a rough picture of such overlap. It also only demonstrates the overlap between these four terms found in Biblical texts. These lines also indicate that הבל does not have the negative connotations as אָוֶן and שֶׁקֶר .



In the book of Isaiah, הבל is never used to mean "idol", but is used in apposition to ריק (Is.30:7) which means "empty, idle, worthless", and תֹּהוּ (Is. 49:4) which means "desolation, desert, emptiness, vanity, worthless thing". And in Is. 57:13, it is used in parallel to רוּחַ.

From the evidence outlined above it is clear that there are several Hebrew words in the Hebrew Bible that have meanings overlapping with הבל. Moreover, the word that seems to be most nearly synonymous with הבל is שָׁוְא. However, Qohelet never uses שוא in place of הבל; שוא does not occur in Ecclesiastes at all. Instead, Qohelet seems to use רעה as a substitute for הבל.[26] The phrase יֵשׁ רָעָה רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ (10:5; 5:12; 6:1) can be used as a summary of the complete sentence when Qohelet considers all the things he has seen as הבל: רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ: (1:14). In 2:17, רַע seems to be partly synonymous with הבל:

> וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים כִּי רַע עָלַי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ:
> I hated life because the deed which is done under the sun is unpleasant to me, for all is futility and chasing after the wind.

In the book of Ecclesiastes הבל is usually used in the phrase גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל, which appears 14 times in the book (2:1, 15, 19, 21, 23, 26; 4: 8, 16; 5:9; 6:9; 7:6; 8:10, 14). In most cases it is used as a conclusion Qohelet has reached about human experiences. At times, it can be used as an introductory statement.[27] It seems that this phrase in 2:15 is used as the conclusion of the comparison between wisdom and folly which begins at 2:12, at the same time as it is used as the introductory phrase for the explanation in 2:16. In this case, זֶה refers to the same destiny of the fool and the wise. Qohelet pronounces this situation as הֶבֶל, because he thinks that it is unfair for the wise to receive the same fate as the foolish. According to the wisdom tradition, wise men expect to get a better outcome than the foolish. But the reality experienced by Qohelet

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[26]See also Fox (1989), 33.
[27]See 8:10.

and the traditional belief are not compatible, therefore he declares גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל. In 2:19, Qohelet uses this phrase to express his concern about the person who will possess his wealth after he dies. He wonders whether he will be a wise man or a fool. Rashbam explains, "for if he is a fool, my gains will be lost from his possession; so the result is that I have toiled for it in vain".[28] Because he is not certain who will possess his wealth, Qohelet pronounces גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל. Ecclesiastes 2:18-26 shows a single concern: one man toils and someone else receives what was earned.[29] It is quite possible that the inequity of the distribution of wealth really disturbs Qohelet. The situation described in 4:8 is even more depressing for a lone man who does not need to share his wealth with others, but continues toiling and depriving himself of pleasure. This situation is called הֶבֶל, because wealth does not make the man satisfied.[30] Nevertheless, in 6:9, Qohelet is aware that even enjoyment lacks any absolute value.[31] He does not give a reason for his judgment. He probably considers that everything is futile or absurd, therefore nothing can improve this situation.

Another circumstance that Qohelet declares גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל can be found in 8:10-14 when Qohelet observes that justice is not done speedily. Rashbam suggests this delay may be due to the long-suffering nature of God.[32] Accordingly, wickedness is increasing, because people do not see judgment being given when evil acts are committed. At the same time, there are many righteous men in the world who get what is due to the wicked, for they do not prosper. In 8:14, Qohelet points out the obvious injustice in this world. This reality clashes with the traditional wisdom teaching which affirms that the wicked will definitely be punished. In addition, Rashbam explains that this situation is called גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל, because men wonder and are amazed at it.[33]

From some of the examples, we can deduce that Qohelet normally uses this phrase to relate situations or circumstances of human beings when he sees injustice, unfairness, uncertainty, and no satisfaction or progress in life.

It is quite difficult, sometimes almost impossible, to identify the antecedents of the pronoun זֶה. The situation outlined in 2:26 is difficult to understand. It is quite problematic to conclude that the way God deals with people is הבל. Gordis tries to resolve the peculiarity of this verse by explaining the way the word חוֹטֵא is used in Ecclesiastes. He points out that Qohelet rarely uses the word in the conventional sense

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[28]Japhet and Salters (1985), 110.
[29]Fox (1989), 39.
[30]See also 5:9.
[31]Gordis (1955), 251. In 6:9 מַרְאֵה עֵינַיִם literally means the sight of the eyes but Gordis suggests that it means here "actual enjoyment".
[32]Japhet and Salters (1985), 172.
[33]Japhet and Salters (1985), 174.

of sinner.[34] He understands that, in this verse, Qohelet means that the man who misses God's purpose, the enjoyment of life, is a "sinner".[35] He also indicates that "this goal of pleasure represents for Koheleth resignation to the inevitable, rather than the cheerful contentment of a pious believer who sees God's will in his destiny, is clear from the closing formula: גם זה הבל".[36] Rashbam explains: the result is that it is for the sake of the wise man that the sinner has troubled himself, therefore I ought to eat and drink and to enjoy my earnings.[37] Crenshaw thinks that the final comment, גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ, "sums up the whole business that Qohelet has endeavored to assess rather than issuing a judgment about God's unpredictable treatment of humans".[38] However, it is possible that the verdict of הבל refers to the arbitrary action of God who does as he pleases.[39] Qohelet judges this situation as הבל, from the human standpoint, because those who work hard are not rewarded, but the lucky instead are beneficiaries. Moreover, we do not know who the lucky ones will be. It is beyond the knowledge of human beings.

Another expression that Qohelet uses quite often is הַכֹּל הֶבֶל which occurs six times (1:2, 14; 2:11, 17; 3:19; 12:8).[40] When Qohelet, uses the word הַכֹּל, it seems that he regards the הֶבֶל experience as a universal phenomenon. The meaning of הבל at 1:2 and 12:8 must carry the sense that is predominant in the book, for these two verses summarise Qohelet's thought and encapsulate his comment about life, which he regards as הבל.[41] In 1:13-14, Qohelet begins his impossible task by exploring every aspect of human experience. He uses his entire effort to understand the events or business of human beings by means of wisdom. He says, "I gave my heart to seek and to search after wisdom over all that was done under this heaven". Gordis suggests that the heart was conceived of as the seat of understanding, hence לב occurs as a synonym for "understanding".[42] Crenshaw also points out that ancient Israelites considered the heart the centre of the intellect.[43] After general observation, Qohelet concludes that everything is futile or absurd. However it is quite difficult to identify the scope of "everything" used by Qohelet. Fox explains:

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[34]Gordis (1955), 217. See also Crenshaw who suggests that the word almost retains its original neutral connotation of errant, missing the mark (1987), 90. Murphy (1992), 26.
[35]Gordis (1955), 217.
[36]Gordis (1955), 218.
[37]Japhet and Salters (1985), 112.
[38]Crenshaw (1987), 91.
[39]Murphy (1992), 27.
[40]If we follow the reading of LXX in 9:1-2, we can add another example of הַכֹּל הֶבֶל.
[41]Fox (1989),44.
[42]Gordis (1955), 199.
[43]Crenshaw (1987), 72.

> Qohelet is not at root saying that everything is insubstantial, or transitory, or useless, or trivial. He does indeed observe these qualities in many beings and actions, but he mentions them mainly to reinforce and exemplify his main complaint, the irrationality of life as a whole.[44]

Crenshaw, however, holds a different view, for he states:

> Qohelet is fond of speaking in universal terms. The thematic statement in 1:2 already pushes his observation about utter futility to the limit, incorporating *hakkōl* (everything).[45]

Crenshaw's suggestion is better than Fox's, for the position of the phrase הַכֹּל הֶבֶל at 1:2 and 12:8 wraps up all aspects of human experience, whether positive or negative. St. John of Damascus understands the phrase in this sense as well when he cites Eccl. 1:14 (καὶ ἰδοὺ πάντα τὰ παρόντα ματαιότης καὶ προαίρεσις πνεύματος) in the story of Barlaam and Ioasaph.[46] It is possible to argue that there may be some exceptions which Qohelet does not consider as הֶבֶל, such as his observation in 3:11 where he says God made everything beautiful in its time (אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעִתּוֹ). This sentence can be understood to perhaps mean that some things are beautiful because God made them beautiful, therefore they are not futile. But in fact there is a limit, that everything is beautiful only according to the time. Therefore when Qohelet comments that everything is futile, he actually means it. The beauty of things is only temporal. Even youthfulness is considered as הבל (11:10), probably because this stage of human experience is short. In fact it is quite difficult to determine the range of the ages of youth in biblical period. Wolff points out that Old Testament writers assume that man will live only a few decades and that if one lives longer, his efficiency will decline after the age of 50.[47] It can also be noted that Qohelet does not add the conditional phrase after הכל הֶבֶל. Therefore this phrase seems to cover every area of human experience, without exception.

Qohelet seems to focus his observations on this world. The phrase "under this heaven" in 1:13 is the variant of the phrase "under the sun" in 1:14.[48] Both of them refer to the things that happen in this world. Thus the scope of "everything" should be limited to the human sphere which can be judged by human wisdom (1:13). Moreover, Qohelet's own experience reinforces his general observation, for after evaluating all the things he has done he concludes that all is futile (2:11). Not only does his experience

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[44]Fox (1989), 47.
[45]Crenshaw (1987), 72.
[46]*St.John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph* (1914), 20-21.
[47]Nu. 4:3, 23; 8:24-26; 1 Chr. 23:24, 27; Ezr. 3:8. For further detail, see Wolff (1974), 81.
[48]Crenshaw (1987), 60, 72.

from the past make him judge everything as futile, but he reckons that everything that is to come is also futile (11:8). It can be pointed out that Qohelet's rationale is based primarily on his intellectual involvement rather than his physical participation in all kinds of experiences.

The superlative הֲבֵל הֲבָלִים is placed at the beginning of the book (1:1), and at the end of the book (12:8), to draw attention and to let the reader know that this book is about הבל. Normally, Qohelet does not use the superlative form elsewhere. The deliberate placing of this superlative form at these two verses creates an *inclusio*.[49] This may lead us to perceive the book as a complete unit, although the thought pattern of Qohelet is difficult to identify. In addition, Qohelet may use a superlative form to emphasise the supreme anguish of himself and human beings. This is an outcry from a learned man who cannot find an answer in traditional wisdom.

Occasionally, Qohelet adds several other phrases to the basic הבל phrase, the purpose being to emphasise and to complement the thought of the central phrase. The most frequent of these additions is רְעוּת רוּחַ (1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6; 6:9) or רַעְיוֹן רוּחַ (1:17; 4:16). Crenshaw translates this phrase as "shepherding the wind", citing this meaning from Hos. 12:2 and Prov. 15:14.[50] In contrast Whitley, citing the same texts, suggests that the root רעה is to be associated with the Aramaic רְעָה "to desire" which corresponds phonemically to the Hebrew רצה "to be pleased with".[51] Though these two scholars give different meanings to the root רעה, the basic meaning of the phrase רְעוּת רוּחַ can readily be gleaned. To shepherd the wind or to desire the wind is pointless. We cannot control and run after the wind because the wind may change direction. Qohelet might have added this phrase after the root הבל to clarify it or to emphasise the impossible attempt made by man. This phrase always follows the root הבל, except in 4:6 where the root הבל is not used. From the context of 4:4-6, it seems that the phrase רְעוּת רוּחַ in 4:6 is used in place of הבל. Qohelet writes: טוֹב מְלֹא כַף נַחַת מִמְּלֹא חָפְנַיִם עָמָל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ: (It is better to have one hand full of peace than two hands full of toil and chasing after the wind). But he could also have written: טוֹב מְלֹא כַף נַחַת מִמְּלֹא חָפְנַיִם עָמָל וְהָבֶל (It is better to have one hand full of peace than two hands full of toil and futility). Qohelet probably chose the phrase רְעוּת רוּחַ according to the context of this verse. The verse is about human desire.[52] Thus the phrase רְעוּת רוּחַ fits the context better. Moreover, the word עָמָל can represent the nuance of הֶבֶל found in 4:4. Seybold also argues that though רוּחַ is in the semantic field of הבל, הבל covers only

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[49]See also Murphy (1992), 30.

[50]Crenshaw (1987), 73.

[51]Whitley (1979), 13.

[52]In 6:9, the idea is similar to 4:6, but the phrase רְעוּת רוּחַ is used together with הבל.

two of many meanings of רוּחַ.[53] Thus the phrase רְעוּת רוּחַ may be used as a complementary phrase rather than a synonym of הבל. It seems that Qohelet often uses the phrase רְעוּת רוּחַ in contexts which relate to work (1:14; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 4:4), except 1:17, 4:6, 16. This evidence suggests that Qohelet considers work done by man as הבל, because it cannot fulfill his desire. Moreover, Fox suggests that the metaphor of רְעוּת רוּחַ (pursuit of the wind) should be understood as indicating the psychological state of the pursuer, in other words, his vexation.[54]

Another complementary phrase is עִנְיַן רָע (an evil business). Only in 4:8 does this phrase follow גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל. The root ענין occurs eight times as a noun and twice in the verbal form in Ecclesiastes. Whitley points out that "ענין in biblical Hebrew is confined to the book of Koheleth (226 310 52 816), but it is used frequently in the Talmud in the sense of business or affair".[55] The related verb ענה (1:13; 3:10) has four meanings: (1) to answer; (2) to be occupied with; (3) to be oppressed or afflicted; (4) to sing or to chant.[56] Crenshaw reckons that either the second or the third meaning is appropriate in the context of 1:13, but he prefers the third meaning in the context of 3:10.[57] Seeing that the verb occurs nowhere else in Biblical or Mishnaic Hebrew, Gordis suggests that this verb in 1:13 and 3:10 should be translated as "to be afflicted with", seeing it as paronomasia on the noun in the same verse.[58] In contrast, Whitley seems to prefer the second meaning, "to be occupied with".[59] Gordis' suggestion is preferable, because in 1:13 the noun which normally carries a neutral sense is modified by the adjective רָע which means "evil". Accordingly, "to be afflicted with" would appear to be closer to the original sense. Though this adjective is omitted in 3:10, the oppressive connotation is retained when we look back on the ceaseless activity of the poem in 3:2-8.[60] The only other occasion the phrase עִנְיַן רָע appears in Ecclesiastes is found in 5:13. Here it seems to refer specifically to a business sense; a man makes a bad investment. In other occurrences the noun seem to be used in a more general sense with the idea that man has to do all the disagreeable tasks in this world. Moreover in 2:23 and 2:26 the noun עִנְיַן carries the connotation of עמל (labour), and in 8:16 it carries the connotation מַעֲשֶׂה (deed, work) has in 8:17. Therefore the phrase עִנְיַן רָע in

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[53]Seybold, 314-315.
[54]Fox (1989), 51.
[55]Whitley (1979), 12. Jastrow gives others meanings as well: correspondence; relation; subject; object; idea (1095). See also Kidd. 6a; B. Bath. 114b.
[56]*BDB* 772ff.
[57]Crenshaw (1987), 73, 97.
[58]Gordis (1968), 210.
[59]Whitley (1979), 12.
[60]Crenshaw (1987), 96-97. See also 2:23; 5:2; 8:16.

4:8 may expand the idea of גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל in the sense that the task of the lone man is futile and disagreeable because he works harder than he has to, and he has nobody to inherit the wealth he earns. The work itself is not futile, but the amount of unnecessary effort given to a job is to be considered as futile by Qohelet.

Another complementary phrase is חֳלִי רָע (an evil affliction) found in 6:2. This phrase is placed alongside the phrase זֶה הֶבֶל to summarise the ultimate misfortune of a man who does want to enjoy his wealth but lacks the ability to do so. A similar phrase, in reverse order רָעָה חוֹלָה, occurs in 5:12, 15. The phrase רָעָה חוֹלָה in 5:12 is used to introduced a new topic of wealth, while in 5:15 this phrase is used to link the discussion about wealth and the man who tries to gain wealth. The reason Qohelet uses this phrase in this context can be found in 5:16, where Qohelet uses several strong Hebrew terms, including חֳלִי, to describe the condition of the burdensome existence of a particular man.[61] No matter how bad the situation in 5:12-16 is, Qohelet does not use הֶבֶל in this context. He may have forgotten to use it, or probably the nuance of הֶבֶל does not quite fit in with this context. Evidently, the phrase רָעָה חוֹלָה seems to be stronger than הֶבֶל, so it is relevant to the context. The situation described is overwhelmingly negative. The case in 6:2, however, is slightly different, for the person in 6:2 lives in a better condition; he gets what he wants. But he does not fully enjoy his fortune; it is enjoyed by others instead. Qohelet concludes this situation by saying זֶה הֶבֶל וְחֳלִי רָע הוּא (this is futile and it is evil affliction). The person in 5:16 has no opportunity to enjoy his wealth, but the person in 6:2 has the capacity to enjoy his wealth. However, he misses the chance to enjoy it; therefore Qohelet regards this circumstance as הֶבֶל. It seems plausible that Qohelet uses הֶבֶל to refer to the situation where the outcome does not concur with logical anticipation. Similarly, in the closely parallel passages, 2:21 and 26, the phrases רָעָה רַבָּה and רְעוּת רוּחַ are interchanged with the phrase חֳלִי רָע. These interchanges suggest that הֶבֶל has a broad emotion-laden stratum with strong evocative possibilities, because in these passages הֶבֶל is used with other interchangeable phrases. These phrases need to be replaced by other phrases according to the contexts, while הֶבֶל remains in every context.

The words רָעָה and רַע are usually translated "evil". This translation tends to imply the ethical meaning of these words. Occasionally, Qohelet uses these words in this sense (4:17; 8:11, 12; 9:3; 12:4), but most of the time they are used in other senses. In Ecclesiastes they are mostly used in the adjectival form. Sometimes, they are used alone, but at times they are used with other nouns, such as: רַע פָּנִים (sad face

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[61] Although there are some textual problems in 5:16, the general idea concerning the unhappy life of this man is clear.

in 7:3); יוֹם רָעָה (bad day or the day of trouble in 7:14; and also in 12:1); דְּבָר רָע (bad or unpleasant situation in 8:3 and harm or trouble in 8:5); מְצוֹדָה רָעָה (dangerous or fatal net in 9:12). These examples show that both רָעָה and רַע can have specific meanings, when they are used with certain nouns. However, it is quite difficult to comprehend their meanings in certain contexts where they are used in a general sense (2:17; 4:3; 6:1). From the contexts of 2:17; 4:3 and 6:1, it is plausible to translate both רָעָה and רַע as "unpleasant" for it carries the sense of unhappy and upsetting experiences. One of the upsetting experiences Qohelet refers to is that no justice is given to the oppressed, for the power is on the side of their oppressors (4:1). This sense is one of many meanings of the word הֶבֶל.

From this evidence, it is plain that there are several words and phrases in the book of Ecclesiastes that have the connotation of הבל but are not able to replace it completely. Most of these words and phrases have negative meanings, which also suggest that nuances of הבל are mostly negative.[62]

From the Old Testament usages, we can conclude that הבל is used in two areas of meanings: idol and futility or uselessness. The former is never used by Qohelet. The latter is used by him. And when this second meaning occurs in the Hebrew Bible it appears in both a figurative and an abstract meaning. In Ecclesiastes הבל is used solely in an abstract sense. Fox points out that "Although *hebel* may still carry some connotations of 'vapor', most of the *hebel*-predications in Qohelet are not live metaphors, because they do not demand a two-level interpretation".[63] Synonyms for הבל are scarcely used in the book of Ecclesiastes, though there are several phrases and words that have similar meanings with הבל. Therefore it looks as though Qohelet expected the reader to understand its meaning from the text itself or that the way Qohelet uses it reflects usage in his own time and community, so he did not need to explain it.

Actually there are a few Hebrew words in the Hebrew Bible that have a similar meaning to הבל: e.g. שׁוא which is used in the Hebrew Bible 64 times, but is never used in Ecclesiastes, תהו which is used in the Hebrew Bible 11 times, but is never used in Ecclesiastes, ריק which is used in the Hebrew Bible 56 times, but is used in Ecclesiastes only once. It seems, therefore, as though Qohelet has deliberately chosen this word as the vehicle for conveying his message.

Therefore the word הֶבֶל is a special term, which for Qohelet means futility. This includes unfairness, absurdity, transitoriness, injustice, no progression, no

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[62]Polk, on the other hand, argues for the positive meaning as well (1967), 7.
[63]Fox (1989), 30.

satisfaction, and unpredictability. Qohelet chose this word because it has a wider range of meanings than other words within its semantic field. The meanings of הֶבֶל are more flexible, while the meanings of other words may be fixed and may mislead the reader of the book. The nuances of הֶבֶל still leave room for Qohelet to add in some concepts that other words cannot convey. Qohelet uses this word to convey the uncertainty of life and show his reader that the traditional system that they had learned was not the absolute authority. There are many problems in this world that cannot be answered by any particular system. We cannot hold on to one particular system. There is no guarantee that one will eventually receive what one anticipates. Things do not always turn out the way we want or expect. We should not expect too much from wisdom, wealth, our own labour, officers or the justice system. However Qohelet does urge people to live their lives to the full before they lose the chance.[64]

The Usage of רָאָה in Ecclesiastes

The second word is the verb רָאָה, Qohelet's favourite one. He uses this verb regularly. It is well distributed through out the whole book, occurring about 50 times. It is like a glue that ties the whole book together, even though the theme keeps on changing. Michel points out that the frequent use of this verb corresponds to the practice of people in ancient time, who tried to understand the order of the world by observation.[65] The observation of world events played an important role in coping with world problems.[66] The first person singular perfect רָאִיתִי is used 18 times. The form רָאִיתִי is particular to Qohelet, because it occurs 102 times in the entire Old Testament, and proportionally is most often found in Qohelet. There are two other books which use this form quite often, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This form occurs in Jeremiah 10 times.[67] Most often the subject of the verb is God except in 4:23-26 where the subject is Jeremiah. In Ezekiel, however, in all the 11 instances in which the verb appears, the subject is always the prophet, except in 16:50.

Qohelet uses this verb to express the fact that he himself has experienced something that is obvious to him. For him, it is definite, and convincing. רָאִיתִי can be translated as "I saw" or "I discovered" or "I realized." Michel states "und dieses häufige Vorkommen hat sogar zu der Annahme eines für Qohelet typischen

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[64]In Eccl.11, Qohelet uses many examples to suggest that it is safer to have more than one sort of investment and those who have the chance to enjoy life they should do while they can.
[65]Michel (1989), 24.
[66]Michel (1989), 24.
[67]Jeremiah 4:23, 24, 25, 26; 7:11; 13:27; 23:13, 14; 30:6; 46:5.

Gattungselementes geführt, das man „Erkenntnis“ oder „observation“ genannt hat".[68] In passages like 2:13 and 24 it does not mean merely the experience of seeing, but rather critical observation. From the context of 2:12-15, Michel observes that "ראה in diesem Zusammenhang ist also nicht Terminus zur Bezeichnung der empirischen Tätigkeit des Weisen, sondern zur kritischen Prüfung der Weisheitstheorie, zur Meta-Empirie".[69]

Besides רָאִיתִי, Qohelet uses other phrases: וְלִבִּי רָאָה (my heart saw or experienced 1:16), וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי לִרְאוֹת (and I turned to see or to consider 2:12), וְשַׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה (And again I saw 4:1, 7), כַּאֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לָדַעַת חָכְמָה וְלִרְאוֹת (When I set my heart to know wisdom and to see 8:16), שַׁבְתִּי וְרָאֹה (Again I saw 9:11).

It is obvious that the first person pronoun is frequently used. And from the phrases shown above, the first person is implied. It is clear that Qohelet uses this verb to express his thought with confidence, regardless of whether it contradicts the accepted wisdom tradition or not. Fox suggests that Qohelet's argumentation is often in the form of testimony and Qohelet tries to strengthen his credibility by reiterating and emphasizing that his ideas are all first hand perceptions.[70] He does not base his judgment on simply seeing but he sets his heart to see. That means he has seriously considered things before offering his comment.

When this verb is used with the first person pronoun, there is no occurrence of the negative לא, nor does any sign of uncertainty ever occur. But when it is used with the third person pronoun, the negative לא sometimes appears. For example:

> וְטוֹב מִשְּׁנֵיהֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עֶדֶן לֹא הָיָה אֲשֶׁר **לֹא־רָאָה** אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הָרָע אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:
> But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil deed that is done under the sun. (Eccl. 4:3).
>
> גַּם־שֶׁמֶשׁ **לֹא־רָאָה** וְלֹא יָדָע נַחַת לָזֶה מִזֶּה:
> Though he did not see the sun and did not know (anything), he has more rest than this (man) [Eccl. 6:5].
>
> וְאִלּוּ חָיָה אֶלֶף שָׁנִים פַּעֲמַיִם וְטוֹבָה **לֹא רָאָה** הֲלֹא אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ:
> Even if he lives a thousand years twice but *he did not enjoy (see)* good things. Do not all go to the same place? (Eccl. 6:6).

In 4:3 and 6:5, not seeing is good, because the unborn child does not have to experience or face the suffering in this world which Qohelet saw. On the other hand,

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[68]Michel (1989), 25.
[69]Michel (1989), 28.
[70]Fox (1989), 88-89.

not seeing (6:6) is bad, because the man who has long life does not experience or enjoy good things.[71] The above statements reflect Qohelet's certainty about these things in life. At this point we may conclude that when רָאִיתִי is used, Qohelet uses it to express his confidence in what he has examined.

The other significant fact about the word רָאִיתִי is that when it is used with the phrase תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ (under the sun) it frequently introduces a new idea or observation,[72] as mentioned in the previous chapter. For example:

וְעוֹד **רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ** מְקוֹם הַמִּשְׁפָּט שָׁמָּה הָרֶשַׁע וּמְקוֹם הַצֶּדֶק שָׁמָּה הָרֶשַׁע׃

Moreover, I saw under the sun: In place of judgment wickedness is there, in place of righteousness evil is there (Eccl. 3:16).

וְשַׁבְתִּי **אֲנִי וָאֶרְאֶה** אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשֻׁקִים אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשִׂים **תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ** וְהִנֵּה ׀ דִּמְעַת הָעֲשֻׁקִים וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם וּמִיַּד עֹשְׁקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם׃

And again I saw all the acts of oppression that are done under the sun: Behold the tears of the oppressed, and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors, and they have no comforter (Eccl. 4:1).

יֵשׁ רָעָה חוֹלָה **רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ** עֹשֶׁר שָׁמוּר לִבְעָלָיו לְרָעָתוֹ׃

There is grievous evil I saw under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner (Eccl. 5:12).

יֵשׁ רָעָה אֲשֶׁר **רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ** וְרַבָּה הִיא עַל־הָאָדָם׃

There is evil which I saw under the sun and it weighs heavily on human beings (Eccl. 6:1).

גַּם־זֶה **רָאִיתִי** חָכְמָה **תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ** וּגְדוֹלָה הִיא אֵלָי׃

And also I saw this wisdom under the sun and it is great for me (Eccl. 9:13).

יֵשׁ רָעָה **רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ** כִּשְׁגָגָה שֶׁיֵּצֵא מִלִּפְנֵי הַשַּׁלִּיט׃

There is an evil I saw under the sun, as error that arises from a ruler:...(Eccl. 10:5).

When we read the statements following the above examples of רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ we should recognize that Qohelet says some things that are contrary to what people commonly expected. It seems that 3:16 formulates a new observation about human

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[71]See Whybray (1989), 144.

[72]Qohelet uses other techniques to introduce a new observation as well. For example, in 5:15, he just uses the introductory phrase "This is also grievous evil" (cf. 5:12). In chapter seven he begins a new observation by starting the new sentence with the word טוֹב.

injustice. The traditional wisdom teaches that the righteous will always be exalted while the wicked will always be punished. For example:

> When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established for ever (Prov. 10:25).
> The hope of the righteous ends in gladness, but the expectation of the wicked comes to nought (Prov. 10:28).
> The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land (Prov. 10:30).

Qohelet might have been familiar with this teaching, but in his real life he saw otherwise. The following verse (3:17) causes problems, because it seems to contradict the statement in the previous verse. In verse 17, he seems to believe in divine judgment. Murphy claims that "he [Qohelet] clearly asserts that, nonetheless, this iniquity will not escape the judgment of God".[73] Crenshaw, on the other hand sees that Qohelet complains repeatedly that the same fate befalls the wicked and the righteous.[74] Then he concludes, "In the light of Qohelet's other comments about judgment, the affirmation of divine judgment appears contradictory. This verse, then, may be a later gloss".[75] Whybray, however, does not regard this verse as an interpolation by an 'orthodox' editor, because the judgment of the wicked was universally held in ancient Israel.[76] He also indicates that Qohelet does not refer to a judgement of the individual after death, because it is a very rare and late concept in the Old Testament.[77] Both Murphy and Whybray see this passage (3:16-22) and the previous passage (3:1-15) linked by a similar idea (compare 3:17 with 3:1).[78] However, both commentators deal only with the judgement of God on the wicked. But Qohelet indicates that God will judge both the righteous and the wicked. Whybray suggests the verb "judge" does not refer to condemnation or punishment but to impartial judicial decisions.[79] However, the context of 3:1-10 and 3:18-21 suggest this is not necessarily so. The verb "judge" in verse 17 may refer to the foreordainment of God that every human being will die. This interpretation is consistent with 3:2 which states, "A time to give birth and a time to die"; and 3:19 which states, "The fate of human beings is like the fate of animals. One fate belongs to them; as this one dies the other also dies". Though Qohelet is concerned about injustice in the world, he does not deny it, for he sees that finally everyone will die. For Qohelet, injustice is part of

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[73]Murphy (1992), 36.
[74]Crenshaw (1987), 102.
[75]Crenshaw (1987), 102. Cf. Lauha (1978), 72 and 75.
[76]Whybray (1989), 77.
[77]Whybray (1989), 77.
[78]Murphy (1992), 36. Whybray (1989), 76.
[79]Whybray (1989), 77.

human life. In 5:7 (Eng. 5:8) he says, "If you see the oppression of the poor, and justice and right taken away in a province, do not be astounded over the matter because every official is watched by the one higher, and there are yet higher ones over them". Also in 1:13, Qohelet says, "God has given an evil business to human beings to be afflicted by it." This means that the righteous are not exempt from this evil business. According to his understanding, Qohelet sees that the righteous and the wicked face the same fate in their daily life. Not only does Qohelet see no difference between the righteous and the wicked, he sees no difference between human beings and animals (3:18). Therefore there is no concrete reason to regard any part of 3:17 as a gloss added by orthodox scribes.

The observation in 4:1 reinforces the seriousness of injustice in this world which he has mentioned in 3:16. Qohelet sees no hope for the oppressed. Thus he sees death as a better solution for injustice in this world (4:2). However, the best solution is not to be born in this world at all (4:3). Then he begins a new observation about human labour in 4:4.

Moreover, the phrase אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי (3:17), literally meaning, "I said in my heart", can imply that Qohelet carefully reflected on this issue. What Qohelet saw made him think about the meaning of life. He does not deny the presence of injustice as he does not deny that God will judge. But he does not know when God will do it, and he does not seem to worry about the timing. Instead of worrying about the time of judgement, Qohelet suggests that everyone should enjoy his work (3:22).

Another matter of human life that Qohelet observes is wealth. People always value wealth, but in 5:12-16, Qohelet denigrates it, by showing from his experience (I saw) that human beings cannot control wealth. Then in 5:17, he gives his personal advice that human beings should enjoy the fruits of their labour:

הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר־רָאִיתִי אֲנִי טוֹב אֲשֶׁר־יָפֶה לֶאֱכוֹל־וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִרְאוֹת טוֹבָה
בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ ו שֶׁיַּעֲמֹל תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מִסְפַּר יְמֵי־חַיָּיו [חַיֵּיהוּ] אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־הוּא
חֶלְקוֹ׃

Behold I saw it is good and proper to eat and drink and to see enjoyment in all his wealth which he labours under the sun during the few days of life which God gave him, for it is his portion (5:17).

The advice given in 5:17 is similar to that in 2:24; 3:12-13 and 3:22. However, it is closest to 3:22 because in both verses the root ראה is used twice: רָאִיתִי and לִרְאוֹת. In the context of both verses the word רָאִיתִי can mean "I saw" or it also carries the connotation of "insight". Thus the word רָאִיתִי can be translated as "I gained insight". This translation is affirmed by noting that the word רָאִיתִי in 3:22 replaces the word

יָדַעְתִּי (I knew) in 3:12. The word לִרְאוֹת in 3:22 literally means "to see", but it also carries the connotation of apprehension. 3:22 is the response to the question "Who knows (מִי יוֹדֵעַ)...?" in 3:21. Hence it can be translated as "to know" or "to understand". However, the word לִרְאוֹת in 5:17 carries the connotation of enjoyment. Thus it can be translated as "to enjoy".[80] The same meaning can be found in 6:6, where the expression וְטוֹבָה לֹא רָאָה is translated as "but does not enjoy good things".

It might be helpful for us to imagine that Qohelet is speaking to us when we read these רָאִיתִי passages. It seems that "you say" is implied in these passages. We may reconstruct the dialogue between him and his reader like this: "You say that wealth is good but I see wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner" (5:12). Qohelet's contemporaries may declare that he who fulfills God's will is happy, but Qohelet declares that he who is happy is fulfilling God's will (Eccl. 5:18).[81]

Wealth alone does not bring happiness, for Qohelet observes that it is evil under the sun for a man to whom God gives wealth but does not give power to consume it (6:1-2). Long life alone does not prove that he is blessed, for it is useless to live so long but to not enjoy life (6:6). No matter how long one lives, everybody will die, so, in 6:9, Qohelet suggests that the pleasure of the eyes (מַרְאֵה עֵינַיִם)[82] is better than the departing from life (מֵהֲלָךְ־נָפֶשׁ). The *RSV* translates the phrase מֵהֲלָךְ־נָפֶשׁ as "the wandering of desire", which corresponds to the view of most commentators.[83] But Whybray points out that the word הָלַךְ in this book–and elsewhere in the Old Testament–several times means "to depart" in the sense of "to die" (3:20; 5:14[15], 15[16]; 6:4, 6; 9:10; 12:5).[84] Both interpretations are possible. The interpretation of the phrase מֵהֲלָךְ־נָפֶשׁ depends on how 6:9 connects to other passages of the book. The closest connection is 6:7 where the word נֶפֶשׁ is used in the sense of "desire" or "appetite". Thus it can have the same meaning in 6:9. However, the phrase מֵהֲלָךְ־נָפֶשׁ can be translated as "departing of desire" in the sense that the dead do not have desire anymore. In the previous chapter we have seen that when the word רָאָה and the word עַיִן are used together, they often refer to "satisfaction".[85] Whitley translates the phrase מַרְאֵה עֵינַיִם as "attaining pleasure".[86] Therefore 6:9 can be translated as "Better is

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[80]Cf. Murphy (1992), 53; Whybray (1989), 102; Crenshaw (1987), 120.
[81]Gordis (1968), 91.
[82]This phrase is literally translated as "the sight of the eyes". Whitley suggests that it connotes both experiencing and enjoying (1979, 59).
[83]See Gordis (1968), 261-262; Crenshaw (1987), 129; Fox (1989), 223; Murphy (1992), 48, 49, 54.
[84]Whybray (1989), 109. See also Whitley (1979), 60.
[85]See 1:8; 4:8; 5:10.
[86]Whitley (1979), 59.

attaining pleasure than the departing from life". Qohelet suggests that people should enjoy life before they die. This verse may be the climax of the first half of the book.

Another aspect of human life that Qohelet observes is wisdom. Some people who cannot find satisfaction in wealth may seek satisfaction through wisdom. However, Qohelet does not think that wisdom is an absolute answer for human problems. He gives an example in 9:13-15 to demonstrate this point. He begins the story by the introductory statement: גַּם־זֶה רָאִיתִי חָכְמָה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּגְדוֹלָה הִיא אֵלָי׃. It is not easy to translate the first half of this verse. *BHS* proposes the deletion of חָכְמָה, without giving a reason. Crenshaw sees חָכְמָה as in apposition to the demonstrative זֶה.[87] Therefore the first part of 9:13 can be translated as "Also this (example) of wisdom I have seen under the sun". The verb רָאָה here carries the sense of experiencing.[88] The word גְּדוֹלָה normally means "great", however, this word seems to have some such connotation as "significant" here.[89] We may be not able to find a reference to a particular historical event from the story in 9:13-16, but it is significant for Qohelet.

This story can be interpreted in two ways. First, the poor wise man successfully saved the town by his wisdom. The second interpretation is that he would have saved the town if the people in the town had listened to his advice. Grammatically, the former interpretation is a possible one, for the use of the simple *waw* with the perfect to refer to the past is common in late Hebrew and in Ecclesiastes.[90] But 9:16 states that the wisdom of the poor man was despised and his words were not heeded. Therefore the latter interpretation is preferable. Crenshaw points out that וּמִלְּטָ can be translated as "could have saved".[91] Gordis objects to this translation on the ground of the verb זָכַר, which he insists cannot mean "think of".[92] He argues that if Qohelet wanted this meaning he would have used חשב.[93] However, Whybray suggests that the verb זָכַר can mean "called to mind", "thought of".[94] Eising states that "The future can also be the subject of the intellectual activity expressed by *zākhar*".[95] According to Isa. 47:7, Babylon should have remembered its end, and Eccl. 11:8, a man should remember the coming days of darkness. In these two occurrences, the verb זָכַר is used in the sense of "paying attention to" something which

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[87]Crenshaw (1987), 165. See also Whybray (1989), 147.
[88]Whitley (1979), 59.
[89]Whitley (1979), 81. See also Whybray (1989), 147.
[90]Whybray (1989), 148.
[91]Crenshaw (1987), 166. Compare *GKC*, § 106p. See also 1 Sam. 13:13.
[92]Gordis (1968), 311.
[93]Gordis (1968), 311.
[94]Whybray (1989), 148.
[95]Eising *TDOT* IV, 67.

will happen in the future. It connotes the sense of warning. Thus the poor man could not save the town because its people did not pay attention to his advice. Though wisdom is normally regarded as essentially a practical attribute for politics and military operations (Prov. 21:22), it is ineffective if it is not put to use. If the man was rich, the people might listen to him. According to the book of Proverbs, the poor are generally treated with contempt (Prov. 14:20; 18:23; 19:7). Though it is better than might, wisdom is not an effective tool to solve a problem if it is used on its own. It needs to be combined with something else such as wealth to create a positive response on the part of the people. The story was significant to Qohelet because of the way the event turned out. It did not turn out according to the expectation of traditional wisdom. Qohelet's experience seems to discredit the traditional wisdom which indicates that "wisdom is better than might". Despite its simplicity, the empirical value of רָאִיתִי gives Qohelet ascendancy over the traditional wisdom sayings.

From all the examples mentioned above we may summarise the usage of the verb רָאָה in Ecclesiastes in four categories: 1) general observation; 2) personal experience and insight; 3) enjoyment; and 4) satisfaction. The verb is most often used in the first two categories.

The Usage of יָדַע in Ecclesiastes

The third verb יָדַע (to know) occurs in Ecclesiastes 35 times. Its noun form דַּעַת (knowledge), occurs only eight times in Ecclesiastes, often together with חָכְמָה (wisdom). In four out of six cases when they appear together, the word חָכְמָה comes before דַּעַת.[96] Only once does דַּעַת appear before חָכְמָה (9:10). However, in both circumstances, they are connected by the conjunction וְ (and). Therefore it seems חָכְמָה and דַּעַת are substantially similar in meaning in Ecclesiastes.[97] Nevertheless, on one occasion (7:12) the relationship between חָכְמָה and דַּעַת is difficult to discern.

כִּי בְצֵל הַחָכְמָה בְּצֵל הַכֶּסֶף וְיִתְרוֹן דַּעַת הַחָכְמָה תְּחַיֶּה בְעָלֶיהָ׃
For the protection of wisdom is the protection of money. And the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who own it.

The Septuagint and Peshitta understood these two nouns חָכְמָה and דַּעַת as genitive following וְיִתְרוֹן (advantage), while the Vulgate has them as subjects.[98] However, the accentuation in the Masoretic text separates them. Fox sees here the word דַּעַת resumed

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[96]Eccl. 1:16, 17; 2:21, 26.
[97]See also Müller *TDOT* IV, 371.
[98]Crenshaw (1987), 138.

by its synonym חָכְמָה.[99] In 10:10 the word חָכְמָה appears in nominal predication with יִתְרוֹן as well. Thus Qohelet seems to treat the word דַּעַת like the word חָכְמָה.

However, there is one exception since the meaning of the noun מַדָּע in 10:20 may not be "thought" as normally understood by many people. In light of the parallelism with the clear phrase וּבְחַדְרֵי מִשְׁכָּבְךָ (and in your bedchamber), Barr suggests that מַדָּע in this context means "repose" or even "bedroom".[100]

The first person perfect "I know" (יָדַעְתִּי) is used only four times in this book. The way it is used is similar to רָאִיתִי, in the sense of empirical knowledge.[101] In 6:5, the verb יָדַע is set in parallelism with the verb רָאָה when Qohelet mentions that the aborted child has neither seen the sun nor known anything. Probably, it can be said that people learn from what they see. Botterweck states "External knowledge or recognition (*yāḏa*) is often paralleled by visual sensory perception: *rāʾâ*".[102] In 8:16, the phrase "to know wisdom" is paralleled by the phrase "to see the business". Probably, Qohelet gains his wisdom through general observation of things happening in the world. He makes no conclusion unless he has considered the matter thoroughly. It seems clear that when Qohelet uses the word יָדַעְתִּי, he is quite certain about the things he states. For example:

> יָדַעְתִּי כִּי כָל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם עָלָיו אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּמִמֶּנּוּ אֵין לִגְרֹעַ וְהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה שֶׁיִּרְאוּ מִלְפָנָיו׃
>
> I know that everything God does will be forever. It is impossible to add to it and it is impossible to subtract from it. God has made it in order that they will fear him (3:14).

Von Rad sees in this verse the strangely paradoxical fact "that to Koheleth the world and events appear to be completely opaque and that, on the other hand, he is aware that they are completely within the scope of God's activity".[103] Qohelet's confidence about the omnipotence of God derives from the fact that there is a time set for every occurrence.[104]

The other uses of ידע in Ecclesiastes are, however, quite remarkable, because it is either used as a question מִי יוֹדֵעַ (who knows), about nine times, or as a negative (no one knows) statement. For example:

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[99]Fox (1989), 231.
[100]Barr (1983), 20.
[101]Compare 1:17 with 1:14; 3:12 with 3:22.
[102]Botterweck *TDOT* IV, 461. Cf. Nu. 24:16f; Dt. 11:2; 1 S. 26:12; Neh. 4:5(11); Job 11:11; Ps. 138:6.
[103]Von Rad (1972), 229.
[104]Von Rad (1972), 229.

וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ֙ חָכָ֣ם יִהְיֶ֔ה אִ֖ו סָכָ֑ל וְיִשְׁלַ֗ט בְּכָל־עֲמָלִי֙ שֶׁעָמַ֣לְתִּי וְשֶׁחָכַ֔מְתִּי תַּ֖חַת
הַשֶּׁ֣מֶשׁ גַּם־זֶ֥ה הָֽבֶל׃
And who knows whether he will be the wise or a fool? Yet he will control all my wealth for which I have laboured and for which I became wise under the sun. This also is futility (Eccl. 2:19).

מִ֣י יוֹדֵ֔עַ רֽוּחַ־בְּנֵ֥י הָאָדָ֖ם הָעֹלָ֣ה הִ֑יא לְמָ֙עְלָה֙ וְר֣וּחַ הַבְּהֵמָ֔ה הַיֹּרֶ֖דֶת הִ֥יא לְמַ֖טָּה
לָאָֽרֶץ׃
Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the beasts goes down into the earth? (Eccl. 3:21).

כִּ֣י מִי־יוֹדֵ֗עַ מַה־טֹּ֤וב לָֽאָדָם֙ בַּחַיִּ֔ים מִסְפַּ֖ר יְמֵ֣י חַיֵּ֣י הֶבְלֹ֑ו וְיַעֲשֵׂ֤ם כַּצֵּל֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר
מִי־יַגִּ֣יד לָֽאָדָ֔ם מַה־יִּהְיֶ֥ה אַחֲרָ֖יו תַּ֥חַת הַשָּֽׁמֶשׁ׃
For who knows what is good for human beings in life, during the few days of their futile life that they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun afterward? (Eccl. 6:12).

כִּֽי־אֵינֶ֥נּוּ יֹדֵ֖עַ מַה־שֶּׁיִּהְיֶ֑ה כִּ֛י כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר יִהְיֶ֖ה מִי־יַגִּ֥יד לֹֽו׃
For he does not know what will happen. For who can tell him when it will be? (Eccl. 8:7).

כִּ֣י אֶת־כָּל־זֶ֗ה נָתַ֤תִּי אֶל־לִבִּי֙ וְלָבֹ֣ור אֶת־כָּל־זֶ֔ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר הַצַּדִּיקִ֖ים וְהַחֲכָמִ֑ים
וַעֲבָדֵיהֶ֖ם בְּיַ֣ד הָאֱלֹהִ֔ים גַּם־אַהֲבָ֥ה גַם־שִׂנְאָ֖ה **אֵ֥ין יוֹדֵ֛עַ** הָאָדָ֖ם הַכֹּ֥ל לְפָנֵיהֶֽם׃
Indeed, all this I took to my heart, and all this I examined: the righteous men and the wise men and their deeds are in the hand of God, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits him (Eccl. 9:1).

כִּ֣י **גַּם לֹא־יֵדַ֔ע הָאָדָ֖ם** אֶת־עִתֹּ֑ו כִּדְגָ֙גִים֙ שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִ֣ים בִּמְצוֹדָ֔ה רָעָ֕ה וְכַצִּפֳּרִ֖ים
הָאֲחֻזֹ֣ות בַּפָּ֑ח כָּהֶ֗ם יוּקָשִׁ֤ים בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם֙ לְעֵ֣ת רָעָ֔ה כְּשֶׁתִּפֹּ֥ול עֲלֵיהֶ֖ם פִּתְאֹֽם׃
For human beings do not know their time; like fishes caught in a cruel net, or birds taken in the snare, so they are trapped by an evil time that falls unexpectedly upon them (Eccl. 9:12).

וְהַסָּכָל֙ יַרְבֶּ֣ה דְבָרִ֔ים **לֹא־יֵדַ֖ע הָאָדָ֑ם** מַה־שֶּׁיִּהְיֶ֔ה וַאֲשֶׁ֥ר יִהְיֶ֖ה מֵאַחֲרָ֑יו מִ֥י יַגִּ֖יד לֹֽו׃
And the fool multiplies words. Human beings do not know what will be, for who can tell them what will happen afterward? (Eccl. 10:14).

עֲמַ֣ל הַכְּסִילִ֔ים תִּיגָ֖עֶנּוּ **אֲשֶׁ֣ר לֹא־יָדַ֑ע** לָלֶ֖כֶת אֶל־עִֽיר׃
The work of the fools wearies them so that they do not know the way to town (Eccl. 10:15).

תֵּ֥ן חֵ֙לֶק֙ לְשִׁבְעָ֔ה וְגַ֖ם לִשְׁמוֹנָ֑ה כִּ֚י **לֹ֣א תֵדַ֔ע** מַה־יִּהְיֶ֥ה רָעָ֖ה עַל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃
Give portion to seven, or even to eight for you do not know what disaster may occur on earth. (Eccl. 11:2).

From these passages, we can see that for Qohelet, the future is uncertain. We cannot predict the future, therefore we can say nothing certain about the future. When יָדַע appears in question form or negative form, it always shows some doubt. Some passages seem like a challenge to the reader as well as a challenge to the belief that we can predict the future. Other passages seem like a warning to the reader that the future is not under his control. The frequent use of the question and negative forms of יָדַע seems to suggest that Qohelet opposes the idea that one can plan for the future. From Qohelet's point of view, human life ends at the point of death. Supposedly a wise man should know many things as indicated in 8:1, but he has no way of knowing what will happen in the future. In fact those who think they know the future are like the fool. This can be seen in 10:14-15 where a fool says many things that he does not know, for he even does not know how to get into the town.

Though Qohelet uses the phrases "who knows?" and "he does not know" or "no one knows" many times, he never uses the phrase "I do not know". He would not give his opinion if he did not know. In 1:17, Qohelet uses לָדַעַת in connection with wisdom, folly and madness. The word דַּעַת occurs twice in this verse as וְדַעַת and לָדַעַת. Gordis, following the Masoretic accentuation, interprets וְדַעַת as an infinitive.[105] However, he thinks the meaning is "to know that wisdom and knowledge are madness and folly".[106] Crenshaw also follows the Masoretic accentuation, so he translates "to know wisdom and to know madness and folly".[107] Murphy sees וְדַעַת as a noun, for he understands that the phrase "wisdom and knowledge" is being repeated from 1:16, forming the contrast with "madness and folly".[108] Murphy's interpretation is supported by ancient versions (Septuagint, Peshitta, Vulgate). No matter how the word וְדַעַת is understood, Murphy's and Crenshaw's interpretation are not different from each other, since wisdom and knowledge refer to the same thing. In this context the verb form can mean "to learn" or "to understand". In the light of 1:13 it can be seen that יָדַע is in the same semantic field with תור (investigate) and דרשׁ (seek). It seems that Qohelet intended to know everything that happened under the sun. He did not want to miss out on any aspect of life in the world. He even wanted to explore madness and folly. Gordis' translation is inaccurate; he seems to be reading his own idea into the text. This part of the book is the introduction, therefore Qohelet is presenting the entire field of experience that he tried to investigate, which includes both wisdom and folly. Moreover, it cannot be seen in other parts of Ecclesiastes that

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[105]Gordis (1968), 212.
[106]Gordis (1968), 213.
[107]Crenshaw (1987), 69.
[108]Murphy (1992), 12.

Qohelet considers wisdom as folly. Instead he finds that folly is madness as indicated in 7:25:

סַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי וְלִבִּי לָדַעַת וְלָתוּר וּבַקֵּשׁ חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן וְלָדַעַת רֶשַׁע כְּסֶל
וְהַסְכְלוּת הוֹלֵלוֹת׃

Again I turned my mind[109] to know, to investigate, and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know that wickedness is foolishness, and folly is madness.

The two occurrences of the infinitive לָדַעַת in this verse have different functions. The first, used with לָתוּר and בַּקֵּשׁ, indicates that Qohelet has as his goal the examination of wisdom and knowledge.[110] The second refers to the result of his attempt. Gordis translates the first one as "to learn" and the second one as "to see"[111] From this verse, the extensive semantic range of the root ידע can be seen. Its semantic field includes "to examine", "to investigate", "to search" and "to perceive". The knowledge which Qohelet gained had derived from his systematic searching. He did not accept any teaching from the tradition on its face value. He put all his energy into understanding wisdom. Significantly, he examines and investigates wisdom and knowledge with his heart.[112] The Hebrew word for heart לב occurs in Ecclesiastes 42 times. In Old Testament understanding, one of the several functions of the heart (לב) is intellectual.[113] The same usage occurs in 1:17 and 8:16. He also used it to judge many things he had observed. Wolff states "Although it [heart] is concealed from men, it is here that the vital decisions are made".[114] Fabry describes the functions of the heart found in the Old Testament:

> As the seat of memory, the heart makes it possible to incorporate particular apperceptions into a larger realm of experience (cf. Dt. 4:9; Isa. 33:18; 65:17; etc.), providing the basis for judgement and responsible action with respect to what is perceived (cf. Josh. 14:7).[115]

The *NIV* translates the word לב in Josh. 14:7 as "conviction" instead of "heart". After exploring the land, Joshua returned to Moses to report what he had in his heart. The other spies who went with him did not agree with him. Though they saw the same information, they came to a different conclusion. Each person can use his own heart to determine the circumstance he is in. He can stand firm on his decision although his

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[109]Literally heart.
[110]Whitley (1979, 68) translates חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן as "wisdom and knowledge".
[111]Gordis (1968), 178, 281.
[112]Cf. 1:13, 17; 7:25; 8:16; 9:1.
[113]Cf. Ex. 7:23; 9:21; etc. Note the phrase "the heart of the wise will know the time and procedure" in Eccl. 8:5. And for more detail about the usage of לב see Wolff (1974), 40-58.
[114]Wolff (1974), 43.
[115]Fabry, *TDOT* IV, 462-463.

conviction contrasts with that of others. Therefore when Qohelet says סַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי וְלִבִּי לָדַעַת, it implies that he took the things he had observed and the things he had experienced into his heart for evaluation. And his repetition of the same topics conveys to us the sense that he meditated upon the issues profoundly.

Another meaning of יָדַע is found in 8:5 when it is used with the phrase דָּבָר רָע (evil matter or bad turn). From this context יָדַע can mean "experience".[116] דָּבָר רָע is a catch phrase which links 8:5 and 8:3. The setting of 8:2-4 is a courtly situation. The advice given may be derived from the royal wisdom tradition. It is not clear how 8:5 links with previous verses because it has the deceptive simplicity of a traditional wisdom saying.[117] Fox observes:

> In both form and content v. 5 has the appearance of a conventional proverb, and we may surmise that Qohelet quotes it in order to cap off his counsels on how to behave in the king's presence, after which he continues with the theme introduced in the second stich of the proverb.[118]

The phrase שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה (whoever keeps a command) in 8:5a may refer to the command of the king in 8:2 or may refer to a commandmemt in general. Fox asserts that the verb יָדַע in 8:5b means "being aware of", "knowing about" rather than "knowing the detail", otherwise it is contradictory with 8:6b-7.[119]

The way the verb יָדַע is used in 8:1 and 5 is quite different from how it is normally used by Qohelet. The positive use of this verb appears because Qohelet is quoting from traditional wisdom. According to the wisdom tradition the wise will accept commands, while the speech of the fool causes him ruin (Prov. 10:8). Wise men know when they should keep quiet and save their life. Moreover, they know that they should keep a command to keep themselves from misfortune (Prov. 19:16). From the context of 8:1-5, we may surmise that a wise man will not come to harm because he knows how to behave in front of a king. Qohelet does not agree with the traditional wisdom, rather he challenges it. Qohelet's opinion is to be found in 8:6-7. כִּי occurs four times in these two verses. We may take the first כִּי asseveratively, the second adversatively, the third resultatively, and the last causatively.[120] Thus we may translate 8:6-7 as follows:

> Indeed (כִּי), there is a time and procedure for every matter.
> But (כִּי) the evil of human beings lies heavily on them.
> For (כִּי) nobody knows what will happen,

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[116]See Gordis (1968), 182; Crenshaw (1987), 148; Murphy (1992), 79.
[117]Murphy (1992), 83.
[118]Fox (1989), 245.
[119]Fox (1989), 247.
[120]Crenshaw (1987), 151-152. Cf. Murphy (1992), 80.

because (כי) who can tell him when it will be?

Knowing how to behave and being aware that there is a proper time for every matter do not reduce the burden on the human mind, for nobody knows when something good will happen. Therefore, the knowledge gained by the wise is limited to the present time. Nobody can definitely predict the future. From the way the verb יָדַע is used in this book it is clear that knowledge of the future is beyond human power.

The Usage of מָצָא in Ecclesiastes

The fourth verb מָצָא (to find) occurs 17 times in Ecclesiastes. The first person perfect form is used five times[121]. And twice it is used with negative לֹא. It is used once in the participial form with the first person pronoun אֲנִי. The first person form is used exclusively only in chapter 7 (26-29). This passage is Qohelet's attempt to answer the question in 7:24–"Who can discover it?" (מִי יִמְצָאֶנּוּ). It might be helpful to look at 7:23-8:1 as a unit:

7:23 כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בַחָכְמָה אָמַרְתִּי אֶחְכָּמָה וְהִיא רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי׃
7:24 רָחוֹק מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה וְעָמֹק ו עָמֹק **מִי יִמְצָאֶנּוּ**׃
7:25 סַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי וְלִבִּי לָדַעַת וְלָתוּר וּבַקֵּשׁ חָכְמָה **וְחֶשְׁבָּוֹן** וְלָדַעַת רֶשַׁע כֶּסֶל
וְהַסְכְלוּת הוֹלֵלוּת׃
7:26 **וּמוֹצֵא אֲנִי** מַר מִמָּוֶת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מְצוֹדִים וַחֲרָמִים לִבָּהּ אֲסוּרִים
יָדֶיהָ טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמָּלֵט מִמֶּנָּה וְחוֹטֶא יִלָּכֵד בָּהּ׃
7:27 רְאֵה זֶה **מָצָאתִי** אָמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת אַחַת לְאַחַת לִמְצֹא **חֶשְׁבָּוֹן**׃
7:28 אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בִּקְשָׁה נַפְשִׁי **וְלֹא מָצָאתִי** אָדָם אֶחָד מֵאֶלֶף **מָצָאתִי** וְאִשָּׁה בְכָל־אֵלֶּה
לֹא מָצָאתִי׃
7:29 לְבַד רְאֵה־זֶה **מָצָאתִי** אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם **יָשָׁר** וְהֵמָּה בִקְשׁוּ
חִשְׁבֹנוֹת רַבִּים׃
8:1 מִי כְהֶחָכָם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֵּשֶׁר דָּבָר חָכְמַת אָדָם תָּאִיר פָּנָיו וְעֹז פָּנָיו יְשֻׁנֶּא׃

[23]All this I tested with wisdom. I said, "I will be wise", but it was remote from me. [24]Remote indeed is that which happens, and very deep. Who can apprehend it? [25]Again I turned my mind to know, to investigate, and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know that wickedness is foolishness, and folly is madness. [26]And I found (the wicked) woman more bitter than death, for she is a net, and her heart is a snare, her hands are bonds. He whom God likes will escape her but he who is offensive will be caught by her. [27]See, that is what I have found, said Qohelet, (as I added) one to one to discover the scheme of things. [28]A (good) woman I continually sought but did not find. One (good) man in a thousand I did

[121]Eccl.7:27, 28 (three times), 29.

> find, but a (good) woman in all these I did not find. [29]Only, see, this I did find: God made people straight, but they seek out the scheme of things. [8:1]Who is wise, and who knows the meaning of anything? A man's wisdom illuminates his face, while the impudence of his face is changed.

Qohelet wanted to be wise but he found out that it was impossible for him to be wise, because the ideal wise man needs to know the meaning of everything. In 3:1-8, Qohelet uses his skill to display that there is a set time for each event. According to wisdom tradition, the wise man is the person who knows when is the right time to speak (Prov. 15:23; 25:11; Sir. 4:23), and the right time to keep silent (Amos 5:13). For Qohelet and some of his contemporaries, knowing the right time is not enough; wisdom is more than knowing the right time. He experienced that wisdom is deeper than anyone can fathom, for he asked, "Who can apprehend it?" (מִי יִמְצָאֶנּוּ). Instead of apprehending wisdom, Qohelet found that the (wicked) woman is more bitter than death, because he could not find a good woman, although one good man out of a thousand he could find. The expression "one out of a thousand" suggests that Qohelet considered the matter carefully. Therefore the verb מָצָא is used in the sense of serious searching rather than general observation.

Furthermore, the wisdom that some of Qohelet's contemporaries were seeking may be some mystery beyond divine revelation, because he found that human beings who tried to find the meaning of anything went out of their minds. Qohelet finds that God has made things straight, but man has to meddle.

Qohelet believes that God is in control of human affairs; human beings do not see God's purpose in every human event because God conceals the meaning from them; but God's purpose *is* in every human event; therefore, Qohelet concludes, human beings are not able to apprehend God's activity from beginning to end (3:11). Instead of attempting to understand all the deeds of God, human beings should accept God's control, as Qohelet suggests in 7:14:

> In the day of prosperity be happy, and in the day of adversity consider: God also made this day and that day as well, so that human beings will not find anything afterward (שֶׁלֹּא יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אַחֲרָיו מְאוּמָה).

Lauha suggests that מצא in this context means "discover (herausfinden)" or "comprehend (begreifen)".[122] This meaning can also be found in Job 11:7:

> הַחֵקֶר אֱלוֹהַּ תִּמְצָא אִם עַד־תַּכְלִית שַׁדַּי תִּמְצָא׃
> Can you fathom God's mystery, or can you discover the limit of the Almighty?

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[122]Lauha (1978), 129.

This verse is the response of Zophar to Job's bold assertion that he knows the hidden purpose behind God's providential deeds–God's ulterior motive was to spy on mortals and humiliate them (see Job 10:13).[123] The way מצא is used in this verse seems to refer to the enormous effort that human beings make in trying to attain God's profound wisdom. Zophar's question implies that Job will not succeed.

Lauha also points out that אחרי often means the time after death (2:18; 3:22; 9:3), however, in 7:14, he thinks it refers instead to the near future.[124] Qohelet sees that the attempt to change one's fortune in the future is useless because God is the author of both good and bad events. Before the powerful God, human beings cannot do anything apart from resigning themselves to ignorance about the ebb and flow of events.[125] However, in this context, אחרי may refer to the time after death for in 9:10 though the verb מָצָא is used as an idiom in the phrase כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ which means "everything one is able to do",[126] its literal meaning is also present because the second half of 9:10 shows that nothing can be found in Sheol.[127]

Beside the misogynistic element in 7:23-8:1, this passage provides further difficulties for us. There are two Hebrew terms that need to be clarified–חשבון and יָשָׁר. Whitley translates חשבון as knowledge which denotes "reckoning."[128] Fox translates it as "calculation" and "solution".[129] Whybray translates it as "the sum of things".[130] Leupold translates it as "the net result".[131] Gordis translates it as "conclusion of thought".[132] But *NIV* translates "scheme of things", which fits the context neatly. This word occurs twice in this passage (7:25, 27), and the context suggests it refers to forbidden divine knowledge. And though Qohelet himself uses all his effort to understand, investigate, and seek (לִמְצֹא) חשבון, it is impossible to find the answer. The adjective יָשָׁר is also difficult to translate. It can be translated as "straight, level (of a way)", "right, pleasing", "straightforward, just, upright".[133] In this context the *NIV* follows *BDB* by translating it as "upright". But when we consider that it is used in

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[123]Habel (1985), 208.
[124]Lauha (1978), 129.
[125]Crenshaw (1987), 139.
[126]Crenshaw (1987), 163.
[127]Cf. Murphy (1992), 93.
[128]Whitley, (1979), 68.
[129]Fox (1989), 236-237.
[130]Whybray (1989), 124.
[131]Leupold (1952), 176.
[132]Gordis (1968),p.284.
[133]*BDB* , 449.

antithesis with חשבון the meaning "straight" makes better sense. It refers to intellectual simplicity.[134]

Qohelet not only considers God's creation beautiful in its time, he also sees that God's activity at present is incomprehensible. No matter how hard human beings try they cannot fathom it. Even the wise are not able to understand. Qohelet not only accepts his own limitation, but also challenges those who claim to understand God's mystery. In 8:17, he states:

וְרָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי לֹא יוּכַל הָאָדָם **לִמְצוֹא** אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בְּשֶׁל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֹל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא **יִמְצָא** וְגַם אִם־יֹאמַר הֶחָכָם לָדַעַת לֹא יוּכַל **לִמְצֹא**:

Then I saw all the work of God that human beings are not able to find out the deed which is done under the sun, on account of which he may toil to seek, but he will not find; even if the wise man thinks he knows, he is not able to find.

From the evidence mentioned above, the verb מָצָא sometimes simply means "to find" (9:15; 11:1), but in many occurrences it is used in the sense of serious search. In 8:17, it seems to be synonymous with יָדַע, therefore it has the connotation of "to understand" or "to grasp".

The Relationship of רָאָה, יָדַע, and מָצָא

If we read Eccl. 8:16-17, we may see that the verbs רָאָה, יָדַע, and מָצָא are used synonymously, but when we look at the context of the entire book it seems that there are three levels of knowledge, varying in levels of certainty and in possibility of attainment. The most certain knowledge is expressed by רָאָה which is straightforward and obvious and attainable in the present life. This knowledge can be attained through observation. On the other hand, יָדַע is always tentative knowledge because of the limitations imposed by the uncertainty of the future. Such knowledge cannot be confidently held. Who knows what the future will turn out to be? The third form of knowledge, מָצָא cannot even be held tentatively because it is beyond the grasp of human beings.

We may compare the way Qohelet use these three verbs with the way we take photographs. Sometimes we want to include many things in our picture. At another time we may want to focus only one thing. The verb רָאָה is used by Qohelet to focus on several things at the same time. But when the verb מָצָא is used he seems to focus on a single object. If we compare these three verbs with camera lenses, we may think of

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[134]Cf.Fox (1989), 243.

רָאָה as a wide-angle lens; יָדַע as a standard lens; and מָצָא as a zoom lens. The relationship of these three verbs can also be illustrated by the size of three circles:

Certain questions beg to be answered when we realize Qohelet's differentiation of the forms of knowledge. Who is his opponent? Against whom is he arguing? What set of ideas does he disagree with (popular Jewish ideas of the eschaton)? Qohelet, probably opposes those who hold firmly to the apocalyptic view. De Vries, comparing the wisdom and apocalyptic traditions, comments:

> Recalling what has previously been said about wisdom's tendency to reduce qualitative time to manageable categories, we see that Qoheleth has gone beyond traditional Israelite wisdom to an absolute denial of the eschatological aspect of time. There can be little question but that this provoked the radical counter-reaction, first of Sirach's mediating doctrine of wisdom–leading ultimately to torah-orthodoxy–and second of full-blown apocalyptic, seen early on in the second century in 1 Enoch and Daniel, and later in Qumran Essenism....
>
> Apocalyptic departs from wisdom, we see, in abandoning empirical observation for esoteric speculation. Yet it does remain, in the final analysis, an intellectual pursuit in which mankind seeks to control its existence. A man is *ḥākām* if he is able to devise rules for harmonious social life; but he may also be *ḥākām* if, like Joseph, he knows the times.[135]

According to De Vries, it seems that there are two kinds of wise men; one in the wisdom circle, another in the apocalyptic circle. Qohelet belongs to the former group and he does not agree with the latter. Qohelet is not alone in his dispute with the apocalyptic view. Agur also challenges those who think they know the mystery of the Holy One:

> I have not learned wisdom,
> nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.
> Who has ascended to heaven and come down?
> Who has gathered the wind in his fists?

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[135]De Vries (1978), 272.

Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is his name, and what is his son's name?
Surely you know![136]

Eliphaz, disputing with Job, asks him:

Are you the first man that was born?
Or were you brought forth before the hill?
Have you listened in the council of God?
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?[137]

There is a certain group of people who think that they can obtain mystical knowledge. However, God opposes this claim as we can see in the oracle against the prince of Tyre in the book of Ezekiel:

Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord GOD:
"Because your heart is pround,
and you have said, 'I am a god,
I sit in the seat of the gods,
in the heart of the seas,'
yet you are but a man, and no god,
though you consider yourself as wise as a god...
You shall die the death of the uncircumcised
by the hand of foreigners;
for I have spoken, says the Lord GOD."[138]

Job also knows the limitation of human ability to obtain real knowledge, so he responds to Bildad and says:

"But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Man does not know the way to it,
and it is not found in the land of the living.[139]

Likewise, Ben Sira warns his disciples:

Do not pry into things too hard for you
or examine what is beyond your reach.
Meditate on the commandments you have been given;
what the Lord keeps secret is no concern of yours.
Do not busy yourself with matters that are beyond you;
even what has been shown you is above man's grasp.
Many have been led astray by their speculations,
and false conjectures have impaired their judgement.[140]

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[136]Prov. 30:3-4 (*RSV*).
[137]Job 15:7-8 (*RSV*).
[138]Ezek. 28:2-10 (*RSV*).
[139]Job 28:12-13 (*RSV*).
[140]Ecclesiasticus 3:21-24 (*NEB*).

Despite its controversial contents, the book of Ecclesiastes was accepted into the rabbinic canon because of its ability to dismiss the speculation of the apocalyptic circle, in addition to its popularity.

So with respect to the three different levels of knowledge present in Ecclesiastes, Qohelet may be significant in our understanding and dialogue with Buddhist notions of knowledge, for example, in the practice of meditation where different levels and types of knowledge are encountered.

The Usage of חָכָם in Ecclesiastes

The root חכם is used in Ecclesiastes 53 times. The verb form occurs only four times, the adjective form occurs 21 times and the feminine noun occurs 28 times. The Hebrew verb in the qal usually refers to the state of being wise. Only in Eccl. 2:19 is it used as a preterite in the sense "to have conducted oneself wisely".[141] Most of the time the adjective form is used to describe a wise person. The feminine noun is used as an abstract noun. In the Septuagint the word חָכַם is rendered by σοφιζω four times; חָכָם by σοφος 21 times; חָכְמָה by σοφία 28 times.[142]

Sung-Hae Kim points out that חָכָם is the ideal image of the human in the sapiential tradition of Biblical Israel as represented in Proverbs[143] and, in a more refined form, in Job[144] and Ecclesiastes.[145] She also indicates that חָכָם is the major image in Ecclesiastes with its antithetical image of כְּסִיל.[146] Murphy states "Folly is never a viable option for Qoheleth".[147] Ellul notices the significance of wisdom in Ecclesiastes:

> Everything passes in review in this book, under the author's ironic gaze, but certain themes stand out. Two of them seem to dominate from the outset: vanity and wisdom. They contradict each other. Wisdom is subjected to vanity, True! But wisdom also constitutes our only weapon against vanity. We witness a kind of debate between wisdom and vanity. On the one hand, wisdom demonstrates the vanity of everything, but is itself vanity. On the other hand, vanity loses its sharpness and bitterness, since the wise person has passed beyond all vanity. At this point, I believe, we begin to see one of the possibilities of Qohelet. But the book does not limit itself to this immanent and uncontrollable circle, since it also refers to God.[148]

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[141]Müller, "חָכָם", *TDOT* IV, 370.
[142]cf. Jarick (1993), 204-205.
[143]The root חכם is used in Proverbs 102 times.
[144]The root חכם is used in Job 28 times.
[145]Kim (1985), 182.
[146]Kim (1985), 185.
[147]Murphy (1992), lxii.
[148]Ellul (1990), 36.

Fox also thinks that Qohelet places wisdom in the centre of focus but understands it differently from Proverbs.[149] Fox also points out that Qohelet is most radical in his concept of human wisdom, not so much in recognising its limits as in extending its scope.[150] Indeed, Qohelet uses the root חכם very extensively in his book. Therefore this root should be carefully investigated to enhance our ability to grasp Qohelet's epistemology.

When the semantic field of the root חכם in the Old Testament is considered, one notices that the roots בין, ידע and מצא are substantially similar in meaning to חכם.[151] In Deut. 32:29 and Job 32:9, חכם and בין stand in parallel; the participle נָבוֹן appears as a synonym of the adjective חָכָם in Gen. 41:33, 39; Deut. 1:13; 1 Kgs. 3:12; Isa. 5:21; Jer. 4:22; Hos. 14:10; Prov. 1:5; 16:21; 17:28; 18:15. Though the word נָבוֹן is a favorite choice of many Old Testament authors to use with the word חָכָם, it appears only once in Ecclesiastes (9:11). Also in the Hebrew Bible, the synonymous use of חָכְמָה and בִּינָה and תְּבוּנָה is frequent.[152] Both בִּינָה and תְּבוּנָה mean "understanding". However, Fox differentiates these two words, observing:

> Assuming that the 44 occurrences of *t'bunah* represent the range of its use in the language as a whole, it appears that *t'bunah* is a hyponym of *ḥokmah*: everything that could be called *t'bunah* could be called *ḥokmah* as well. *Binah*, however, though in most regards encompassed by *ḥokmah*, sometimes refers to mental ability and activity in a way that would not be called *ḥokmah*. *Binah* is understanding per se. *Ḥokmah* is the broader mental capacity that makes understanding possible, as well as the knowledge that understanding produces, but it is not the understanding itself.[153]

Nevertheless, both בִּינָה and תְּבוּנָה do not appear in Ecclesiastes. The absence of these two words seems to suggest that the way Qohelet uses the term חָכְמָה is different from the way in which it is normally used in other books of the Hebrew Bible.

Qohelet seems to prefer using the root ידע to relate to the root חכם. Denotatively, the noun דַּעַת is scarcely distinguishable from חָכְמָה.[154] In Eccl. 1:16-18, the words חָכְמָה and דַּעַת occur four times each. In two occasions they are in juxtaposition (vss. 16 and 17). In 1:17, the root ידע is first used as a verb with the object חָכְמָה while its second occurrence can be either a verb or a noun. The passage can be understood either way, but Qohelet might have intended that the second root be understood as a noun. The Septuagint understands it to be a noun. Moreover, at the end of 1:16 the phrase "wisdom and knowledge" is used. לדעת in 1:17 governs four

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[149]Fox, "Wisdom in Qohelet",(1987), 115.
[150]Fox, "Wisdom in Qohelet",(1987), 115.
[151]Müller. "חָכָם", *TDOT* IV, 371. Cf. Fox (1987), 138.
[152]Müller. "חָכָם", *TDOT* IV, 371.
[153]Fox "Words for Wisdom", (1993), 158.
[154]Fox (1987), 139.

objects.[155] חָכְמָה and דַּעַת are used as a word-pair. Similarly, the words הוֹלֵלוֹת and שִׂכְלוּת or סִכְלוּת are used as a word-pair in opposition with חָכְמָה and דַּעַת.[156] However, in 10:13, instead of being used as a word-pair, הוֹלֵלוֹת and סִכְלוּת are used synonymously. The supplement of the word רָעָה after הוֹלֵלוֹת can be seen as a matter of emphasis[157] or clarification of the meaning of הוֹלֵלוֹת. In 1:18, חָכְמָה and דַּעַת are obviously used as synonyms since רָב is parallel with יוֹסִיף and כָּעַס is parallel with מַכְאוֹב. The context of 1:16-18 merely suggests the limits of human knowledge, warning about the high cost of wisdom. Wisdom itself has no advantage over folly because the end result is not satisfactory. Traditionally, it was accepted that the educational process needed to be painful for a beneficial result. However, Qohelet does not agree with this belief.

Qohelet regards wisdom as a valued object of his search. The painful discipline from the traditional teaching does not help him to reach his goal as can be seen in 7:23b and in the rhetorical question, "Who can find it?" in 7:24. Both act as an assertion that no one can reach out far enough to touch wisdom or penetrate deeply enough to lay hold of it.[158] Moreover, in 7:25, three words are used as verbs with the objects חָכְמָה and חֶשְׁבּוֹן. These three verbs are יָדַע (to know or to learn), תוּר (to explore) and בָּקַשׁ (to seek). These three verbs indicate that wisdom is something that is not easily obtained. It does not belong to anybody at birth. In 7:23, Qohelet uses the root חכם twice and it seems to cause a contradiction: כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בַחָכְמָה אָמַרְתִּי אֶחְכָּמָה וְהִיא רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי׃ (I have tested all this by wisdom; I thought, "I will be wise," but it was beyond my grasp). Qohelet seems to use wisdom as a tool to evaluate all the things he has investigated so far. In fact Qohelet has begun to use wisdom as his tool for investigation in 1:13. The problem arises when on the one hand, Qohelet claims to be employing wisdom (1:13 and *passim*) in his examination of reality, but on the other hand, affirming in 7:23 that his quest for wisdom ended in failure.[159] How can Qohelet use wisdom to investigate other things, since he himself is not able to lay hold of wisdom yet? One way to solve this ambiguity is to recognise that Qohelet is using חָכְמָה in two different ways because the semantic range of חָכְמָה is quite wide. The translation of the Septuagint does not help because the semantic range of σοφία is as

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[155]Cf. 7:25. Gordis [(1968),148] translates 1:17a: "I learnt that wisdom and knowledge are madness and folly".

[156]Cf. Schoors (1992), 19. Later in 2:12, they are used in opposition with חָכְמָם alone, and this leads Fox [1989, 183] to suggest that הוֹלֵלוֹת and סִכְלוּת form a hendiadys, meaning "inane folly", "senseless folly", or the like.

[157]Cf. Chrewshaw (1987), 174.

[158]Crenshaw (1987), 145.

[159]Murphy (1992), 71.

wide as חָכְמָה. The range of both is from skill to knowledge. In 2:21, the word חָכְמָה is used together with the word דַּעַת (knowledge) and כִּשָּׁרוֹן (skill). Fox suggests that Qohelet is extending the previous semantic range of the word חָכְמָה (possibly under Greek influence)[160] to include "the rational-analytical faculty that enables one to investigate the world and infer new truths about life".[161] This is a development of the "skill" part of the semantic range of חָכְמָה. Qohelet considers the term with two related meanings, skills and knowledge. In the first part of 7:23, we can see how Qohelet uses חָכְמָה to refer to the rational-analytical faculty. In the second half of 7:23, אֶחְכָּמָה is used to refer to wisdom as the knowledge which understands world events.

The accompanying noun חֶשְׁבּוֹן in 7:25 may help to clarify the meaning of חָכְמָה because they are in juxtaposition. Though the word חֶשְׁבּוֹן is peculiar to Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Bible, it is found in Sirach and later Hebrew.[162] It occurs again in Eccl. 7:27, and 9:10. It means "calculation", "conclusion", "sum". In Sir. 42:3, it refers to reckoning or keeping accurate accounts. Notably, the plural חִשְׁבֹנוֹת occurs only in 7:29 and 2 Chr. 26:15. In 2 Chr. 26:15, it designates a kind of fortification, hence it refers to "devices". In 7:29, Qohelet contrasts what God did and what human beings have done. The word חִשְׁבֹנוֹת is contrasted with יָשָׁר (upright). This contrast points out that human beings are not content with what God has done for them. Therefore חִשְׁבֹנוֹת may refer to that ultimate knowledge sought by human beings. Whitley proposes to render "questionable things".[163] Qohelet does not state clearly whether human beings have succeeded. Crenshaw thinks that they have succeeded.[164] Crenshaw's view fails to take account of the context. In 8:1, Qohelet asks the rhetorical question: "Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of things?".[165] It seems that human beings have not yet succeeded in finding the answer to the mystery. The editor of the book seems to agree for he says, "there is no end to the making of many books" (12:11). From the way Qohelet uses the word חֶשְׁבּוֹן, it helps us to understand another meaning of חָכְמָה as ultimate knowledge.

When 7:25 is compared with 1:17, the word דַּעַת is replaced by חֶשְׁבּוֹן. This may imply that they are synonyms. In addition, the nouns חֶשְׁבּוֹן, דַּעַת and חָכְמָה are used in juxtaposition with the noun מַעֲשֶׂה in 9:10. In the context of 9:10, Qohelet considers wisdom or knowledge as belonging to the scheme of the living. Wisdom is of no use for the dead. Human beings can search for knowledge as much as they want

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[160]Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth", (1993), 122-123.
[161]Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth", (1993), 119.
[162]Murphy (1992), 74.
[163]Whitley (1979), 70.
[164]Crenshaw (1987), 148.
[165]A similar question appears in 7:24.

when they are still alive, but their wisdom will come to an end when they die. The wording and the sentiments of 7:25 are almost the same as 1:17. The phrase "סַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי וְלִבִּי", literally means "I and my heart turned", perhaps understood as "Again I turned". Qohelet almost repeats the whole process of investigating. However, the second time he gains some insight for he concludes that wickedness is foolishness, and folly is madness. This interpretation follows the suggestion of Gordis that we have the double accusative after a verb of cognition.[166] Lauha though, accepting Gordis's interpretation considers these nouns as "glossenartig", because of the difference between רֶשַׁע and הַסִּכְלוּת.[167] In fact there is a relationship between the roots רשׁע and סכל in 7:17. Therefore it is possible for Qohelet to use רֶשַׁע and הַסִּכְלוּת as synonyms. Gordis states "Folly and wickedness are synonymous for Koheleth, as for all the Wisdom teachers, though his views of what folly means differ from theirs".[168] In addition, Murphy notices that only the noun סִכְלוּת has an article while others in the series do not.[169] Fox decides to follow the Septuagint which reads סִכְלוּת without an article, for he regards all four nouns as direct objects of לָדַעַת.[170] However, this phenomenon is quite common in Ecclesiastes. Schoors gives the lists of verses where several nouns occur in a series in which one noun has the article while others do not (2:8; 3:17; 4:4; 4:9-12; 7:25; 10:19, 20; 12:1, 4, 6).[171] Apart from the article, the order of הוֹלֵלוֹת and סִכְלוּת is reversed (cf. 1:17 and 2:12). Qohelet may use the reverse order and the article as indicators to inform his reader of the change in function of these two nouns. The two infinitives לָדַעַת in 7:25 have different functions as well. The first one expresses Qohelet's intention, so it can be rendered "to learn". The second states the end result, so it can be rendered "to realise". Qohelet intends to learn about wisdom, but he only finds that wickedness is foolishness. The function of 7:25 is not quite clear. Gordis considers it as a part of a conclusion for a section (7:15-25).[172] Lauha regards it as an introduction of a new section (7:25-8:1).[173] Fox places it in the unit 7:23-8:1a.[174] The ambiguity of the position of 7:25 may lead us to regard it as a transition statement. Its position also depends on how we treat the four nouns at the end of the verse. Nevertheless, Qohelet shows us that his attempt to obtain ultimate knowledge is not successful, but he is able to learn basic knowledge that is practising

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[166]Gordis (1968), 281.
[167]Lauha (1978), 139 and 141.
[168]Gordis (1968), 179.
[169]Murphy (1992), 74.
[170]Fox (1989), 240.
[171]Schoors (1992), 166.
[172]Gordis (1968), 276.
[173]Lauha (1978), 141. Cf. Murphy (1992), 74-75.
[174]Fox (1989), 236-237. Cf. Crenshaw (1987), 144.

wickedness is foolish. The meaning of חָכְמָה can also mean general knowledge. This kind of wisdom Qohelet thinks human beings can obtain.

Another synonym for the root חכם is the root צדק. In 7:16, Qohelet warns, "Do not be too righteous, do not be excessively wise; lest you will be ruined".[175] In 7:15, Qohelet has already pointed out that righteousness is not able to protect the righteous person from harm, while the wicked person, despite his wickedness, lives long. Qohelet did not suggest that the wicked live long because they are more intelligent than the righteous, knowing how to protect themselves from harm. His intention is to demonstrate from his experience that the traditional promises of long life for the good person and an early death for the sinner is not always true. In fact he also warns, "Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; lest you will die before your time" (7:17). Wisdom and righteousness are not able to protect anybody from harm. The limitations of human wisdom are also expressed in a "Prayer to Every God", a late-period (probably seventh century B.C.E.) Sumerian poem from the library of Ashurbanipal:

> Man is dumb; he knows nothing;
> Mankind, everyone that exists–what does he know?
> Whether he is committing sin or doing good,
> He does not even know.[176]

Kim remarks that "Qoheleth presented the ideal of the wise and the righteous in his piercing recognition of human limitation and divine transcendence".[177] The aspect of limitation of the wise and the righteous is re-emphasised in 9:1:

> כִּי אֶת־כָּל־זֶה נָתַתִּי אֶל־לִבִּי וְלָבוּר אֶת־כָּל־זֶה אֲשֶׁר הַצַּדִּיקִים וְהַחֲכָמִים
> וַעֲבָדֵיהֶם בְּיַד הָאֱלֹהִים גַּם־אַהֲבָה גַם־שִׂנְאָה אֵין יוֹדֵעַ הָאָדָם הַכֹּל לְפָנֵיהֶם׃

> Indeed I give all this to my heart, and I have tested all this: the righteous, and the wise men and their deeds are in the hand of God. Human beings know neither love nor hatred. Everything before them...

It is not easy to translate this verse, but the general idea is understandable. Both the wise and the righteous are not in control for they are not sure whether God loves or hates them. The final phrase הַכֹּל לְפָנֵיהֶם is ambiguous. The Septuagint joins it to 9:2 and emends the first word הַכֹּל to הֶבֶל. In 9:2 the wise are not mentioned, only the righteous, used with the wicked, indicating that both meet the same fate. However, it

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[175]Schoors [1992] suggests that the participial form יוֹתֵר is sometimes used as an adverb, meaning something like "especially, exceedingly" (p. 114). He also suggests that למה can be translated as "lest" (p.137).
[176]*ANET*, 392.
[177]Kim (1985), 149.

is implied that the wise also meet the same fate. In 2:15, Qohelet states that the wise and the fool meet the same fate. Kim notes that it is only in Ecclesiastes that חָכָם becomes the major image, surpassing צַדִּיק (an individual ideal in Israel, fully portrayed in the book of Proverbs with its full assurance of reward and security that come from God).[178] In the book of Proverbs, among 66 occurrences of צַדִּיק, 44 verses include the antithesis of צַדִּיק and רָשָׁע. It seems that human beings are conceived of as belonging either to the group of צַדִּיק or to that of רָשָׁע with each having a changeless image. Qohelet does not deny this distinction, but he questions the reward and destiny of the righteous, which often turns out to be the opposite of what the traditional proverbs say (Eccl. 3:17; 9:2; 7:15; 8:14).[179] Moreover, Qohelet makes this ideal image somewhat less secure for he states, "Surely, there is no righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (7:20). The relationship between צַדִּיק and חָכָם suggests that the nuances of חָכָם include the moral and ethical. However, Fox thinks that Qohelet does not regard wisdom as an ethical or religious virtue but only pairs righteousness and wisdom in the categories as positive values.[180] Fox's view is weak for in 7:25 Qohelet equates wickedness and foolishness. Indeed Qohelet does not agree with the principle of Proverbs–that to be smart is to be righteous and being righteous makes you smart.[181] Probably, the word צַדִּיק becomes less "moral and ethical" in Ecclesiastes because it is associated with חכם. But Qohelet does not use the root חכם in a morally neutral way. Otherwise, he would associate wisdom with wickedness. The prophets do not particularly regard the sages (חֲכָמִים) as morally virtuous but attack them as lying (Jer. 8:8-9. Cf. Is. 29:14). Despite the fact that Qohelet sees injustice in this world (8:14), he does not attack wisdom or the sages. Qohelet does attack the fool and praises the wise. In 7:5, he says "It is better to listen to a wise man's rebuke than to the song of fools".[182] If Qohelet is morally neutral, he would not complain when he sees that the hearts of human beings are full of evil and madness (9:3). He does not advocate craftiness as a means to survive in the world.

Another way to understand the root חכם is to examine its antonyms in the book. The word כְּסִיל is found in parallel with חכם eleven times, mostly in opposition. Another seven times it is found independently. The word סִכְלוּת is found in parallel with חָכְמָה six times. The word הוֹלֵלוֹת is found in parallel with חָכְמָה three times. Notably, the three common words for fool in the book of Proverbs are פֶּתִי, כְּסִיל and

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[178]Kim (1985), 153-154.
[179]Kim (1985), 175.
[180]Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth", (1993), 128.
[181]Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth", (1993), 128.
[182]Cf. 9:17.

אֱוִיל. Both אֱוִיל and כְּסִיל are found in opposition to חָכָם, but פֶּתִי is not.[183] Qohelet does not use the words פֶּתִי and אֱוִיל at all. Ecclesiastes has a very distinct vocabulary for fool. Qohelet uses only seven Hebrew words: כְּסִיל, כְּסִיל, סָכָל, סָכָל, סִכְלוּת (שִׂכְלוּת), הוֹלֵלוּת and הוֹלֵלוּת. The words סָכָל, סִכְלוּת (שִׂכְלוּת), הוֹלֵלוּת and הוֹלֵלוּת are not found elsewhere in the Old Testament. However, the word כְּסִיל occurs in Proverbs 49 times. In Proverbs, the כְּסִיל is a more sinister figure than the אֱוִיל.[184] He is akin to the לֵצִים, without כָּבוֹד, hates דַּעַת, is completely self-confident, despises his parents, is without לֵב, does not desire בִּינָה, is a source of כַּעַס, and his basic quality is אִוֶּלֶת.[185]

The כְּסִיל in Psalms is not the self-confident and selfish person he seems to be in Proverbs, but rather akin to בַּעַר, lacking שֵׂכֶל and בִּינָה.[186] He is aligned with the בַּעַר against the חֲכָמִים.[187] The characteristics seen in Psalms and Proverbs reappear in Ecclesiastes: the כְּסִיל is notorious for his babbling, his drunkenness, his tendency to evil and his כַּעַס (vexation, anger).[188] Occasionally a new emphasis is apparent: the כְּסִיל is too much concerned with superficial pleasure.[189]

In Eccl. 2:14, Qohelet states that the wise have eyes in their head, but the fool walks in darkness. He seems to agree with the traditional teaching that the wise have more advantage than the fool in the sense that the wise see clearly the direction they are going while fools do not know where they are going. However, Qohelet sees the limitation of the wise for at the end the wise will die along with the fool (2:15-16). Moreover, he is particularly dismayed because he has no way of making sure that after he dies his successor will be wise (2:18-19). Qohelet is quite concerned with the quality of his heir. It is possible to pass on his wealth to his heir, but it is uncertain that he can pass on his wisdom to his heir. Despite accepting that nobody can escape death, Qohelet and many noble men in the east hoped that their heirs would be wise and would carry on their fame. Even if the successor happened to be wise, that would be little consolation to Qohelet, for the investment in the projects and fortune is his alone.[190] At the end of 2:19, Qohelet describes how he obtained his wealth. Crenshaw regards the verbs שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי and חָכַמְתִּי as combining to form a hendiadys, rendering "for which I toiled ingeniously".[191] Apparently, this verse indicates that Qohelet gains wealth through wisdom and hard work. This idea is repeated in 2:21 without the word עָמָל,

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[183]Donald (1963), 287.
[184]Donald (1963), 287.
[185]Donald (1963), 287.
[186]Donald (1963), 288.
[187]Donald (1963), 288.
[188]Donald (1963), 289.
[189]Donald (1963), 289.
[190]Crenshaw (1987), 88.
[191]Crenshaw (1987), 88. Cf. Gordis (1968), 223; Schoors (1992), 217.

but with two additional nouns דַּעַת and כִּשָּׁרוֹן. In 4:4, כִּשָּׁרוֹן and עָמָל are used synonymously. Whybray suggests that the phrase כָּל־כִּשָּׁרוֹן הַמַּעֲשֶׂה in 4:4 would be better rendered by "success" or "achievement" rather than "skill in work".[192] Both renderings are possible. It depends on how the word עָמָל is rendered. If it is rendered by "wealth", the former is better. But if it is rendered by "toil", the latter is better.

Another interesting contrast between כְּסִיל and חָכָם is found in Eccl. 4:13:

> טוֹב יֶלֶד מִסְכֵּן וְחָכָם מִמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן וּכְסִיל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע לְהִזָּהֵר עוֹד׃
> It is better to be a poor youth and wise than an old king and fool who does not know how to take warning anymore.

There are obviously three word-pairs in this comparison: כְּסִיל and חָכָם; זָקֵן and יֶלֶד; מֶלֶךְ and מִסְכֵּן. This comparison is a characteristic of Qohelet. Normally, in the wisdom tradition a wise man tends to be an older man. Müller notes that חָכָם is often found associated semantically with זָקֵן and in Ezk. 27:8f both are used synonymously.[193] Moreover, many verses in the book of Proverbs present the stark contrast between wealth and poverty in an effort to steer the student away from a lifestyle which would lead to indigence.[194] In other words, a wise person would not be poor. Those who want to become rich have to have wisdom. Qohelet willingly accepts that wealth can be gained by means of wisdom (2:21). For Qohelet, on the one hand, poverty does not hinder anyone from gaining wisdom. But on the other hand, wisdom does not guarantee wealth, for he says "bread does not belong to the wise, nor wealth to the clever" (9:11). Qohelet definitely values wisdom higher than wealth for in 2:9, he says "I became greater than all who were before me in Jerusalem–my wisdom still stayed with me". Despite his incomparable wealth, Qohelet retained his wisdom.[195] The age of the king or ruler is not the cause of his folly, but because he does not take advice anymore. The word מִסְכֵּן (poor) is peculiar to Qohelet within the Bible because it only appears here and in 9:15-16. It may occur in Is. 40:20 if we consider the vocalization מְסֻכָּן as erroneous.[196] The noun form מִסְכֶּנֶת (which means scarcity) only occurs in Deut. 8:9. The verb form סָכַן is used many times in the Bible. In Is. 22:15, it is used to refer to a steward who is working in the palace. Probably, the poor wise youth might serve the old foolish king in the palace. Alternatively, it may only mean "poor" like רָשׁ in 4:14. Later on this wise youth became the successor of the

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[192]Whybray (1989), 83.
[193]Müller. "חָכָם", *TDOT* IV, 372.
[194]Pleins (1987), 66.
[195]Müller. "חָכָם", *TDOT* IV, 379-380.
[196]Gordis (1968), 243.

old king after coming out of a prison. This interpretation follows the commentators who understand that the subject of יָצָא in 4:14 is the youth not the king.[197]

Another interesting comparison between חָכָם and כְּסִיל is found in 6:8:

כִּי מַה־יּוֹתֵר לֶחָכָם מִן־הַכְּסִיל מַה־לֶּעָנִי יוֹדֵעַ לַהֲלֹךְ נֶגֶד הַחַיִּים׃
For what benefit for the wise than the fool? What benefit for the poor by knowing how to walk in front of others?

The rhetorical question of this verse indicates that the wise have no advantage over fools. Qohelet does not agree with previous teachers who took for granted the absolute superiority of wisdom over folly. The first half of this verse is clear, but the second half is not at all easy to interpret. Consequently, the function of the second half is unclear. Crenshaw does not agree with the usual translation for עָנִי as "the poor" because the Old Testament does not usually associate wisdom and poverty.[198] Whitley proposes that the word connects with the root עָנָה "to answer", and renders "intelligent man".[199] This attempt seems unnecessary since, in 4:13, Qohelet has already mentioned a poor wise youth, and in 9:16, he mentions the poor man's wisdom. Qohelet sees no problem with this connection. However, the word עָנִי is used to mean "poor" only once in Ecclesiastes. Therefore it could have a special nuance here. In 5:7, Qohelet remarks, "If you see the oppression (עֹשֶׁק) of the poor (רָשׁ), and justice and right are taken away in a province, do not be astounded over the matter...". Qohelet recognises the poor as being oppressed. In fact the word עָנִי is a term preferred by prophets and the Psalmist to mean "poor, oppressed".[200] This term also occurs in Proverbs only eight times in restricted contexts.[201] In this light we can better understand the second half of 6:8. The wisdom of the poor man does not help him to gain wealth because he is oppressed. Also in 7:7, Qohelet states that the oppression will make the wise foolish, and a bribe will corrupt the mind. Though the poor may have the potential to acquire wealth through wisdom, those who have political power use their influences to oppress them by using bribes. Therefore the poor do not really have an opportunity to acquire wealth. Those with political power hinder the chance of the poor wise man to gain wealth.

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[197]Fox (1989), 207; Murphy (1992), 41. The translation of 4:14-16 is uncertain because the references are vague.
[198]Crenshaw (1987), 129.
[199]Whitley (1979), 59.
[200]Pleins (1987), 63. It occurs in prophetic literature 25 times; in the Psalms 31 times.
[201]Pleins (1987), 63. For details about the divergence in word choice between the prophets and the sages, see Pleins's article.

Eccl. 6:8 is loosely linked with 6:7 because they relate to a similar idea. The first half of 6:7 refers back to the general teachings of the wisdom tradition which shows a great concern for diligence and offer strong warnings against laziness. In Prov. 6:6-11, the wise hold up the ant as the model of success:

> Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest–and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man. (*NIV*).

According to this model, the wise are diligent men who work very hard and prepare everything in advance like the ant. They barely get enough sleep because to rest is considered laziness. People in Qohelet's time probably held this idea very strongly. They regarded a diligent man as a wise man. Therefore it is possible to see that Qohelet connects the wise man in 6:8 back to the diligent man in 6:7. Several sayings in Proverbs assert that hard work, seen as a sub-class of wisdom and righteousness, leads to wealth as sloth leads to poverty (cf. 10:4-5; 18:9; 24:30; 26:12, 16).[202] Yet Qohelet does not see the benefit of being wise in order to gain wealth. He points out that these people keep collecting wealth, but they will never be satisfied. They keep collecting but they will never use their treasures. Therefore Qohelet, in 6:9, suggests that human beings should seek pleasure (מַרְאֵה עֵינַיִם)[203] rather than death (מֵהֲלֶךְ־נָפֶשׁ).[204] The wise work very hard to avoid poverty, but they may work themselves to death without enjoying life at all. Wisdom will usually bring wealth to the wise, but they cannot be certain that they will get benefits from their wealth because ultimately everything is determined by time and chance (9:11), and without warning bad times may suddenly befall them (9:12).

Qohelet considers the recognition of death as part of the human situation to be a characteristic of the wise. He says, "the heart of the wise is in a house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in a house of feasting" (7:4). Qohelet thinks that to go to the house of mourning is better than to go to the house of feasting because in the house of mourning, one is reminded about the brevity of life and the inevitability of death (7:2). According to Sir. 22:12, the official period of mourning lasted seven days. This period allowed the participants to meditate on the meaning of life. It helps them to think how they should live before they die. From this evidence, it can be seen that the wise are those realistic persons who are well prepared for the moment of death. They will make

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[202]Van Leeuwen (1992), 28.
[203]Whitley (1979), 59.
[204]Whybray (1989), 109.

use of their time in a balanced perspective. They will work diligently; likewise, they will enjoy their life.

Qohelet appears to counsel moderation; for he advises, "Do not be too righteous, do not be excessively wise; why should you be ruined? Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time?" (7:16-17). Crenshaw asks, "Does Qohelet advise moderation in everything one does, adopting the Greek concept of the middle way?".[205] This concept is also an important teaching of Buddhism and I will treat this in greater detail in a subsequent chapter. It is not easy to understand what Qohelet means by saying "do not be excessively wise". Crenshaw and Murphy think Qohelet's advice may be ironic.[206] This warning may be given to those who think that they are wise and display their skill in front of other people. Sirach 10:26 warns against putting one's wisdom on display and exhibiting one's accomplishments at inappropriate times. Crenshaw explains that Qohelet's warning against excessive wickedness does not endorse moderate evil, rather, it accepts villainy as a harsh fact (7:20).[207] Fox understands that Qohelet teaches us to accept in ourselves a mixture of good and bad, just as we should accept that same mixture in the events of our days (7:14).[208] The true wise persons, according to Qohelet, are those who accept human limitations. They acknowledge that there is injustice in the world as seen in 7:15. They themselves may die because of injustice. It is no use to express anger against injustice, because only fools nurture anger (7:9). Instead of showing one's righteousness, Qohelet suggests patience (7:8). Indeed, the house of mourning will help the wise to humble themselves.

Although, Qohelet recognises the limitations of wisdom when it is placed in the realm of justice (as mentioned above), he seems to see its advantage when it is placed in the political world as seen in 7:19-20:

> הַחָכְמָה תָּעֹז לֶחָכָם מֵעֲשָׂרָה שַׁלִּיטִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בָּעִיר׃
> כִּי אָדָם אֵין צַדִּיק בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה־טּוֹב וְלֹא יֶחֱטָא׃
> Wisdom is stronger for the wise than ten rulers who are in the city. For there is no righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

In this passage, Qohelet seems to be quite confident for he is able to make such a big contrast. Who are these ten rulers? Crenshaw thinks it may refer to the ten rulers (*deka prōtoi*) mentioned by Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.8.11) as residing in Jerusalem as well

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[205]Crenshaw (1987), 140-141.
[206]Crenshaw (1987), 141. Murphy (1992), 70.
[207]Crenshaw (1987), 141.
[208]Fox (1989), 234.

as in Hellenistic cities.[209] However, this may be just one of the traditional sayings. It is a typical wisdom saying that compares wisdom favorably with administrative authority and power (cf. Prov. 21:22, 24:5). The figure "ten" is probably simply hyperbole.[210] We do not know for sure why Qohelet placed 7:19 after 7:15-18. Fox places 7:19 after 7:12 because he thinks its current place interrupts the connection between verse 18 and 20.[211] However, Ellul sees the connection between verse 19 and 20 for he explains:

> The gift enjoyed by the wise person here does not make him better than others. His wisdom does not make him stronger than those in power. Rather, his superiority consists in knowing that everyone is unjust, a sinner, and that no one does right. This knowledge makes him stronger than ten city authorities.
>
> Who can fail to recognize politics at work? It knows how to use others' sin, based on precisely what evil a given person has committed. The political person is not taken in by the authorities' magnanimous talk, but knows that all of politics' wonderful promises amount to wind. He does not place his confidence in a given party leader. These basic "qualities" of the political individual show his wisdom. Such knowledge effectively makes him stronger than all others. In this passage the sage does not have the wise person's moral grandeur or the loftiness of his vision in view. Rather, he shows us the wise one's ability to understand human nature.[212]

7:19 is not only connected with 7:20, but it is also connected with 7:18, for the wise know how to behave with moderation. Therefore Fox's attempt to change the location of 7:19 is not necessary. Grammatically, the connection between 7:19 and 20 depends on how one understands the particle כִּי in front of 7:20: as a causative or as an emphatic. Even if it is emphatic, the complex mind of Qohelet should be allowed to interrupt his own thought with momentary inspirations at any point. The sage knows his own limitations and the weakness of human beings as well.

Another example of political wisdom is found in 9:13-18. Here, Qohelet makes another big contrast. A poor wise man was able to rescue a small town which had a few people in it from a great king who built great siegeworks against it. In this story we can see that wisdom is useful in terms of its ability to help people succeed at war. Qohelet thinks "wisdom is better than strength" (9:16a). For he learns that the wise person's calm words have more value than a captain's shouts in a crowd of fools (9:17). He also sees, "wisdom is better than weapons of war" (9:18a).

This story seems to demonstrate the success of wisdom in the political world. However, Qohelet makes a remarkable twist in this story. The wise person who rescued the town is despised. People in the town forgot him. Worse than that is the

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[209]Crenshaw (1987), 142.
[210]Whybray (1989), 122.
[211]Fox (1989), 232.
[212]Ellul (1990), 138-139.

fact that a single sinner ruins much happiness (9:18b). Qohelet introduces the story at 9:13 by saying that he saw a piece of wisdom which seemed significant for him. Despite its superiority, wisdom fails to keep its value when it is overlooked by people, or one person in a group behaves immorally. Clemens understands that Qohelet acknowledges the benefits of wisdom within this life; but it operates in a world dominated by sin and death which constantly threaten to undermine it.[213] However, Whybray thinks that the word חוֹטֵא in this context probably means one who misses, or is lacking in sense.[214] No matter which alternative we choose, it is clear that the goodness of wisdom can be ruined by human error. Ellul remarks, "Wisdom is also fragile in that it does not take much to corrupt it".[215]

We can see from this perspective that Qohelet understands that wisdom is not permanent; it is not dependable. Human beings only receive temporary benefits from wisdom. It must be received as the gift of God (2:26; cf. 12:9, 11). In 2:26, Qohelet clearly states that wisdom, like enjoyment in life, is dependent on God's favour and not the other way around. Qohelet, like other people in Israel, thinks that the experiences of the world were always divine experiences.[216] Murphy remarks:

> One cannot deny that the Israelite distinguished between the two [divine and worldly] but they are not separated as independent areas. The world, as creation of God, is the arena of his activity and of human life. Here are manifested various aspects of the divine–even in the most "worldly" things (Psalm 19; Job 28:24-27; Wis 13:1-9). While the modern can distinguish between degrees of religious and worldly, there is no evidence that Israel did so.[217]

In Ecclesiastes, wisdom is regarded as the God-given ability for humans to perform the tasks of their daily lives. Human beings are not able to obtain wisdom, if God has not given it to them. The way for human beings to obtain wisdom is to seek God's favour. In 2:26, the one who pleases God is not a sinner, for the phrase לְאָדָם שֶׁטּוֹב לְפָנָיו (lit. one good before him) is in opposition to חוֹטֵא (sinner). Gordis equates חוֹטֵא with a fool who misses God's purpose, the enjoyment of life.[218] Following Gordis's interpretation, the wise are those who know how to enjoy life. However, Crenshaw understands this passage to refer to the "fortunate and unfortunate, lucky and unlucky" people, not good and bad people.[219] Following Crenshaw's interpretation, the wise are the lucky persons. Fox seems to combine these two interpretations for he thinks

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[213]Clemens (1994), 7.
[214]Whybray (1989), 149. Cf. Fox (1989), 264.
[215]Ellul (1990), 147.
[216]Von Rad (1972), 62.
[217]Murphy (1978), 40.
[218]Gordis (1968), 227. Cf. 7:26.
[219]Crenshaw (1987), 90.

that God has given the lucky reason (חָכְמָה), the savvy to do what is beneficial, which in context means avoiding toil and enjoying what comes to one's hand.[220] In fact the aim of the toiler is to enjoy life. But he misses the opportunity because God has not granted him the opportunity. Wisdom in this context seems to refer to the ability to enjoy life without allowing it to become burdensome. This passage also demonstrates clearly that God is in control and has full liberty to become involved in human affairs. Qohelet points out that wisdom is from God, but God is unpredictable. No one will know to whom God will give wisdom. Thus at the end of 2:26, Qohelet utters a statement of futility.

Interestingly, in 8:5, Qohelet states that the heart of the wise will know the time and procedure (מִשְׁפָּט).[221] This verse seems to suggests that the sage knows when and how to act in front of a king This saying also resembles traditional wisdom sayings. The phrase שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה (whoever obeys a command) is found also in Prov. 19:16, where the word of the teacher is presumably meant. However, the context of Eccl. 8:5 seems to derive from 8:2 where the command of the king is mentioned. Also the phrase דָּבָר רָע in 8:5 resembles the phrase בִּדְבָר רָע in 8:3. Since this passage is associated with the context of the royal court, 8:5 may refer to the wise officers who know what and when to speak to a king.[222] The wise officers would avoid harm by obeying a king. Fox sees that there is difficulty in verse 5b which asserts that the wise man will know the time and judgment, because he thinks that this statement contradicts 8:6b-7 which assert that human beings cannot know the time of an occurrence.[223] Therefore he construes verse 5b to mean the wise man is aware that there is a time of judgement.[224] Recognising the contradiction between 5b and 6, Whybray, however, accepts the text of 5b as it stands, explaining that the statement of verse 6 radically rejects the statement of verse 5.[225]

In fact the difficulty in understanding the relationship between 8:5 and 8:6-7 lies in the various meanings of the four occurrences of כִּי in these two verses. Michel sees that verses 6-9 are comments made by Qohelet about the traditional wisdom sayings which include 8:2-5.[226] Thus, he regards the first כִּי as a deictic (or strengthening)

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[220]Fox (1989), 189.
[221]Literally, judgment. The phrase וְעֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט seems to have the same meaning as the phrase פֵּשֶׁר דָּבָר (the interpretation of a thing) in 8:1.
[222]Cf. Prov. 15:23.
[223]Fox (1989), 247.
[224]Fox (1989), 247.
[225]Whybray (1989), 132.
[226]Michel (1989), 201. Crenshaw ([1987], 151) also thinks that Qohelet introduces traditional wisdom to challege it.

particle to emphasise the following clause.[227] His idea is supported by the word יֵשׁ, in verse 6, which serves to stress the actuality of the statement.[228] He, then translates the first כִּי as "nun" (now), the second as "für", the third and the fourth as "denn".[229] Murphy, however, regards the first כִּי to affirm the thought of verse 5b, so he translates it as "indeed, verily".[230] He translates the second as "but" because he sees that the following clause goes counter to the tenor of the preceding lines by introducing an "evil"; the third as "in that" for he regards it as resultive; the final as "because" for he thinks it is causal and presents a reason for human ignorance.[231]

The translation of the first כִּי actually depends on how one perceives the connection between verse 5 and 6. The first כִּי is the most crucial word for the rest of verse 6 and 7. Another necessity for understanding the meaning of this passage is to find out what is the intention of Qohelet is in mentioning רָעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו in 6b. Verse 6a seems to respond to 5b, and also confirms the reality of things as already mentioned in 3:1. Lauha suggests that wickness will rest heavily upon a king; events will catch up with him.[232] Crenshaw thinks Qohelet observes that human evil burdens the mind, making it incapable of knowing the right time for action.[233] It is not easy to make a concrete decision on the meaning of this passage. It is possible to see that Qohelet quotes traditional sayings, including 8:1-5, to challenge it. But he also partially accepts such sayings for their practical value but not insofar as they present wisdom as being an absolute guide. He does not deny the fact that sages have the wisdom to make judgements in certain circumstances. But he points out that there is a limitation for human beings to know everything that will happen. Even though they know the time of their death they have no power to hold on to their life-breath (8:8).

From what we have seen about the way Qohelet uses the root חכם in Ecclesiastes, it is clear that wisdom is one of his major concerns. Wisdom is always commended highly, especially when it is compared with folly. According to the wisdom tradition, wisdom is a means to gain wealth, but Qohelet regards wisdom itself as the end. Gese points out that in early wisdom, wealth and acquired goods were the sign of one's pious action.[234] Qohelet sees that wise but poor is better than rich but foolish. Though Qohelet does not agree with what the sages in the past taught, he still

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[227]Michel (1989), 202.
[228]Michel (1989), 195.
[229]Michel (1989), 202.
[230]Murphy (1992), 80.
[231]Murphy (1992), 80.
[232]Lauha (1978), 149.
[233]Crenshaw (1987), 152.
[234]Gese (1983 was first published in German in 1963; see bibliography), 143.

belongs to the tradition. He feels dismay when he sees that no justice is being done for the wise. Wisdom (or reason) is his standard tool for investigating human experiences from one extreme to the other (1:13). Qohelet tries to discover everything by himself. For him, wisdom must be justified through the individual's experience and reason.[235] In contrast, other wisdom literature perceives that wisdom exists essentially independent of the individual mind.[236] Though wisdom seems to be Qohelet's ultimate goal, he is aware that no one can claim it as a certainty. What Qohelet has discovered is not absolute.

The semantic field of the root חכם is quite broad. In Ecclesiastes it is used together with יָדַע, דַּעַת, מָצָא, נָבוֹן, חֶשְׁבּוֹן and צַדִּיק, sometimes in juxtaposition and sometimes in parallelism. Berlin points out:

> One of the functions of the second line of a parallelism is to disambiguate the first, especially if the first does not make clear what the topic of conversation is. This occurs in nonparallelistic discourse as well...The terseness of the poetic line always puts it at risk of being misunderstood, either because information is omitted or because the reader/hearer is unable to focus on the main point (the topic of conversation). This can be partially overcome through parallelism, for the second line directs the interpretation of the first; the first line comes to be understood in terms of the second. On the other hand, the second line may introduce an element of ambiguity into the first. The first line takes on a new shade of meaning when it is read in terms of the second. Both disambiguation and ambiguity coexist in parallelism...In parallelism after parallelism we are torn between the similarity of the lines and, at the same time, their dissynonymity. Parallelism is forever poised between redundancy and polysemy.[237]

Qohelet uses חכמה in a way that demonstrates the importance of polysemy. Rather than analysing mental processes in a step-by-step manner, he uses the various meanings of חכמה to suggest that all these meanings combine to point toward the all-encompassing meaning of the term. Thus he does not use תבונה and בינה, because their respective meanings are too limited. We may deduce from what we have observed so far that a wise person is the one who acts righteously, lives moderately, knows what to do and when to act in specific circumstances, and is aware of the limitations of human wisdom. Wisdom is a gift from God. There are many things that human beings cannot understand. Definitely, wisdom is stronger than folly, but it cannot conquer death. The real wisdom in Ecclesiastes is admitting that human wisdom is futile.

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[235]Fox (1989), 95.
[236]Fox (1989), 96.
[237]Berlin (1985), 96-99.

The Usage of עָמָל in Ecclesiastes

The noun עָמָל is used 22 times and the verb עָמַל 13 times in Ecclesiastes. In most cases the verb is used to refer to the toil or labour that human beings perform. The Septuagint always translates this Hebrew verb as "μοχθέω" and the noun as "μοχθος".[238] Only once (8:17) does עָמַל have the meaning of "to try" in the context of seeking to comprehend God's work, though this verb can mean "to work" in general as in 2:11 and 3:9. In 3:9, it could refer to the activity of the worker in general: מַה־יִּתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא עָמֵל׃ (What advantage does the worker get from that for which he has laboured?). In 2:11, it is used with the verb עָשָׂה with two levels of meaning, one is parallel with עשה and one adds to it and goes beyond it (notice the phrase, שֶׁעָמְלָתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת):

וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי בְּכָל־מַעֲשַׂי שֶׁעָשׂוּ יָדַי
וּבֶעָמָל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת
וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃

Then I turned to all my deeds which my hands *had done*
and to (all) the work I *had endeavoured* *to do*.
But behold everything is futility and chasing after a wind and there was no benefit under the sun.

The main verb עָמַלְתִּי of the second line is parallel with the main verb עָשׂוּ of the first line and the infinitive לַעֲשׂוֹת is subordinate to it; לַעֲשׂוֹת is used as the infinitive construct.[239] Therefore עָשָׂה and עָמַל are in the same semantic field. They have related meanings which usually means "to work", but עָמַל has the connotation of working harder than עָשָׂה. It generally has a negative tone, even extending to life itself (2:22, 24).[240] Though these two roots can be used interchangeably, Qohelet seems to make the distinction clear. He always uses the verb עָמַל with its cognate noun עָמָל[241] and the verb עָשָׂה with its cognate noun מַעֲשֶׂה. The verb עָשָׂה is never used with the noun עָמָל.

The meaning of the noun עָמָל is multi-valent, because it sometimes refers to the activity of toiling, sometimes to the material which is the result of that activity, namely

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[238]Jarick (1993), 254.

[239]Gibson [(1994), §105c] indicated that the infinitive construct may be the direct object and ל is equivalent to את (§94). The way Qohelet uses the phrase שֶׁעָמְלָתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת is similar to the English phrase "try to do" or "try and do". This phrase occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible. Schoors [(1992), 182] suggests that the infinitive לַעֲשׂוֹת has a gerundial function. Cf. *GCK* § 114o and Gibson (1994), §108a. The *RSV* has "the toil I had spent in doing it". The *NIV* has "what I had toiled to achieve". The *New Jerusalem Bible* has "and all effort I had put into its achieving".

[240]Murphy (1992), lx.

[241]Only in Eccl. 10:15 do we find the noun עָמָל used with the feminine verb תְּיגָעֶנּוּ. However Whitley argues that תְּיגָעֶנּוּ is a third masculine singular of the *Taqtul* type (1979, 88).

wealth.[242] In some passages this noun can be clearly translated as "wealth". For example:

וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־**עֲמָלִי** שֶׁאֲנִי **עָמֵל** תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ שֶׁאַנִּיחֶנּוּ לָאָדָם שֶׁיִּהְיֶה אַחֲרָי׃

I hated all my *wealth* which for I *had laboured* under the sun that I must leave it to the man who will live after me (Eccl. 2:18).

וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ הֶחָכָם יִהְיֶה אִוֹ סָכָל וְיִשְׁלַט בְּכָל־**עֲמָלִי שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי** וְשֶׁחָכַמְתִּי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ גַּם־זֶה הָבֶל׃

And who will know whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all my *wealth* for which I *laboured* skillfully under the sun. This also is futility (Eccl. 2:19).

כַּאֲשֶׁר יָצָא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ עָרֹם יָשׁוּב לָלֶכֶת כְּשֶׁבָּא וּמֵאוּמָה לֹא־יִשָּׂא בַּ**עֲמָלוֹ** שֶׁיֹּלֵךְ בְּיָדוֹ׃

Since he came from his mother's womb naked, he shall go again as he came, and shall take nothing from[243] *his wealth* in his hand when he goes (5:14).

Qohelet, indeed, uses another Hebrew word which means "wealth". The word עֹשֶׁר, found in 5:12 and 13 refers to property and investment. Since the argument of 5:14 follows a story in 5:12-13, it is clear that the word עָמָל in 5:14 refers to עֹשֶׁר. Therefore עָמָל can mean "wealth".

In some passages this noun can be translated as "wealth", or "labour". It is a matter of interpretation of each individual passage. For example:

וְסַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי לְיַאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל כָּל־**הֶעָמָל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי** תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃

I turned to make my heart despair over all the *wealth (or labour)* [244]which I *laboured* for under the sun (Eccl. 2:20).

אֵין־טוֹב בָּאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל וְשָׁתָה וְהֶרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בַּ**עֲמָלוֹ** גַּם־זֹה רָאִיתִי אָנִי כִּי מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא׃

There is nothing better for a man than eating and drinking and making his soul to see something good by means of his wealth (or in his labour).[245] This also I saw that it is from God's hand (Eccl. 2:24).

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[242]Fox (1989), 55. Cf. Gordis (1955), 213.

[243]ב can mean "from", see Schoors (1992), 193-194.

[244]Crenshaw, Fox and Murphy translate it as "toil". Gordis thinks that in this context it has both meanings, "toil" and "wealth".

[245]Crenshaw translates it as "earning". Fox and Murphy translate it as "toil".

It is interesting to note that whenever the purpose of the verb עָמַל is implied–gaining more "wealth", the rhetorical question "what advantage...?" is asked. Normally, people labour to earn more income, but not everybody achieves that aim. Thus Qohelet usually asks, "what advantage/benefit (מַה־יִּתְרוֹן)".[246] For example:

מַה־יִּתְרוֹן לָאָדָם **בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שֶׁיַּעֲמֹל** תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃
What advantage is there to a man for all *his work which he labours* under the sun? (Eccl. 1:3).

מַה־יִּתְרוֹן הֶעוֹשֶׂה בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא **עָמֵל**׃
What advantage does the worker get from his *labours* (Eccl. 3:9).

וְגַם־זֹה רָעָה חוֹלָה כָּל־עֵמֶת שֶׁבָּא כֵּן יֵלֵךְ וּמַה־יִּתְרוֹן לוֹ **שֶׁיַּעֲמֹל** לָרוּחַ׃
This also is grievous evil: as he came so he will depart. What advantage is there for him who *labours* for the wind? (Eccl. 5:15).

These questions can be simply answered by saying that the benefit which man will get from his labour is wealth. In 6:7, Qohelet states that all man's toil is for his mouth, refering to his desire (Prov. 16:26). According to tradition, hard work should bring profit (Proverbs 14:23).[247] But relying on his experience, Qohelet says, "there was no benefit under the sun" (2:11). The reason for Qohelet's sadness is not because he is poor, but because he is bothered by the fact that he has to leave his wealth and his possessions to the man who will live after him (2:18). Besides, he is not certain whether that man will be a wise man or a fool (2:19). Knowing this makes him despair (2:20). However, he is not alone in this situation for he observes that someone who earns wealth with wisdom, knowledge and skill, must give his portion to another man who did not labour with him (2:21). Worse than this, this person is alone; he has neither son nor brother. Because he is alone and can depend on no one else, there is no end to all his toil. In addition, he is not content with whatever wealth he accumulates. At the end he complains, "For whom am I toiling, and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" (4:8). From this complaint we may deduce that Qohelet considers that the toil of human beings is in opposition to pleasure. This does not mean that Qohelet does not value work. Qohelet acknowledges that it is necessary to work in order to make a living, and to realise some satisfaction. In 9:7, he advises: Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart because God has already approved your deeds (מַעֲשֶׂה). But he regards overworking as stupid and ultimately unrewarding for the

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[246]See also 2:22 which has another phrase (מַה־הָּוָה לָאָדָם) with a similar connotation.

[247]Though the Hebrew word which means hard work is עצב instead of עָמַל , the idea is the same.

worker because it reduces his opportunities for the enjoyment of life while he is able to do so.[248]

Although more wealth provides the rich with more food, they do not have a peaceful sleep (5:11). In 5:11, Qohelet contrasts the attitude of the slave (הָעֹבֵד)[249] and the rich (עָשִׁיר) toward the result of their respective labours. The slave is satisfied with what he earns, while the rich are not. In Ecclesiastes, there are only two instances in which Qohelet describes how slaves think (5:11; 7:21). In 7:21, Qohelet suspects that slaves may curse their master. In fact, he is not concerned about the life of slaves. Qohelet hardly mentions anything about slaves. Only in 2:7, does Qohelet mention that he himself had many slaves and in 10:7, gives an example of the unusual status of a slave. Slaves in Qohelet's time seem to be a group of people who were poor farmers, probably working for Ptolemaic monarchs (5:8).[250] The noun עֶבֶד is used only once in 9:1, referring to the deeds of the righteous and the sages. Qohelet does not speak for slaves. He may not understand their real problems. He is more concerned with the well-being of the well-to-do. He does not use the root עמל to refer to the work of the slave. The way Qohelet uses this root suggests that he does not refer to physical hardship but rather self-inflicted toil of traders.

We do not know exactly what causes the wealthy to be sleepless. Probably anxious worry over property keeps a rich person awake during the night. 5:12 seems to suggest that rich people are consumed by anxiety lest they lose their accumulated wealth, and the concern eats away at them, causing mental and physical distress.[251] Though the wealth they guard causes them much trouble, rich people still want more wealth. The rich person invests his money to gain more riches, but he loses his money in a risky business venture (5:13). He may intend to gain more wealth to pass it on to his son. The phrase "he has nothing in his hand" (וְאֵין בְּיָדוֹ מְאוּמָה) seems to support this interpretation. However, the phrase וְהוֹלִיד בֵּן seems to have another function as well. It prepares the way for the metaphor of the new born baby in 5:14. The subject of the verbs (יצא, ישוב, בא) in 5:14 is ambiguous; however, Murphy thinks that the subject of these verbs is the adult because עָמָל is mentioned. Qohelet uses this comparison to emphasise the inability of human beings to have control over wealth. One is naked at both birth and death. Since one is not able to take anything with him when he dies, there is no point in trying to gain more wealth than one is able to keep.

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[248]Whybray (1989), 25.

[249]This is a participial form of the word עָבַד. The Septuagint translates it as δουλος.

[250]See the story of the Tobiah whom I mentioned in chapter three on Reconstruction of the Audiences of Ecclesiastes.

[251]Crenshaw (1987), 122.

The effort one tries to make is like striving after the wind (5:15). The final phrase of 5:15 "that he toils for the wind" (שֶׁיִּיעַמֹל לָרוּחַ) varies the usual phrase "chasing after the wind" (רַעוּת רוּחַ). In this case עָמַל has the same connotation as רעוּת which carries the sense of striving after something. For Qohelet, עָמַל is an effort to reach the unreachable goal.

Qohelet uses the Hebrew word יִתְרוֹן to refer to the goal that human beings try to realise. Many people labour to get it. Ogden thinks that it is vital for an understanding of Ecclesiastes that we be as clear as possible about the semantic field of יִתְרוֹן.[252] He also points out that the root יתר, from which יִתְרוֹן is coined by Qohelet, speaks of the profit or gain one might expect from commercial enterprise, the "bottom line" which so interests the investor.[253] The word יִתְרוֹן occurs ten times in Ecclesiastes (1:3; 2:11, 13[2X]; 3:9; 5:8, 15; 7:12; 10:10, 11). The Septuagint translates it as περισσεία. The participial form יוֹתֵר occurs seven times in Ecclesiastes; twice the Septuagint translates it as περισσεία, and five times as περισσος. Four times it functions as an adverb (2:15; 7:16; 12:9, 12).[254] There is also the word מוֹתָר which occurs only once in 3:19. This word is probably a combination of two Hebrew words וּמַה־יּוֹתֵר for the Septuagint has τί ἐπερίσσευσεν.[255] Following the Septuagint reading of 3:19b the rhetorical question should be, "What advantage is there for human beings over the animals?". Though this rhetorical question does not change the meaning in this context since this question expects a negative reply, the Septuagint is probably right to understand the word מוֹתָר as two separate words. Qohelet often uses rhetorical questions מַה־יּוֹתֵר or מַה־יִּתְרוֹן (1:3; 3:9; 5:15; 6:8, 11). A similar rhetorical question מֶה־הֶוֶה is also found in 2:22. The negative statements occur only twice, in 2:11 and 10:11. The rhetorical question seems to emphasise the point of despair more strongly than the negative statement.[256] From the context of 3:19-21, Gese points out that we can conclude that in Qohelet's time the idea existed that the human spirit rose into the godly sphere after death.[257] This idea probably occurred because people in that period tried to solve the problem of retribution. Since they could not see justice being done in this life, they postponed it to life after death. However, Qohelet does not endorse this alternative; he stresses the finality of death and the lack of connection between the dead

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[252]Ogden (1987), 22.
[253]Ogden (1987), 22.
[254]Ogden (1987), 23. Cf. Schoors (1992), 114.
[255]Jarick (1993), 235.
[256]Watson [(1984), 341] points out that the rhetorical question is used for dramatic effect: it involves the audience directly, if they are addressed, or it creates tension which then requires resolution. One of the specific functions of rhetorical questions is emphatic negation.
[257]Gese (1983), 146. It seems that Gese interprets the word רוּחַ as spirit rather than life-breath understood by many scholars (cf. Crenshaw, Whybray, Fox and Murphy).

and their earthly life (9:4-6).[258] The rhetorical question, then, aptly challenges the idea.

In 2:11, the negative phrase אֵין יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ is used in juxtaposition with רְעוּת רוּחַ and הַנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל.

וּפָנִיתִי אֲנִי בְכָל־מַעֲשַׂי שֶׁעָשׂוּ יָדַי וּבֶעָמָל שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל
וּרְעוּת רוּחַ וְאֵין יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃

Then I turned to all my deeds which my hands had done and to the trouble with which I had laboured. But behold everything is futile and chasing after a wind and there is no benefit under the sun (Eccl. 2:11).

It seems that the phrase אֵין יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ has the same connotation as הַנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל. When there is no advantage in life it is futile. From the context of 2:11, it seems that Qohelet is looking for some special benefit from his extra effort (עָמָל). The purpose of עָמָל according to Qohelet is profit. For Qohelet, עָמָל is the cause and יִתְרוֹן is the effect. When he does not see the expected result, he regards עָמָל as futility. Schoors suggests that the preposition ב in front of עָמָל can be interpreted as expecting a value (a *beth pretii*).[259] In this regard, the connotation of עָמָל is similar to יִתְרוֹן. Interestingly, the participial form יוֹתֵר (which functions as an adverb in 2:15 and 7:16) carries the nuance of "extra effort". Further on, in 4:4, Qohelet sees that the achievement of every labour is jealousy–competition with one's neighbor. While the word עָמָל has a semantic root which means labour, in this context it takes on an extended meaning which has negative overtones; human beings work because of their selfish nature, to acquire, to realise a profit. Fox points out that in the Hebrew Bible, the noun עָמָל often means "trouble" or "iniquity", and is frequently collocated with or parallel to words meaning "iniquity", "deceit", "futility"; for example: in Isa. 10:1, it is parallel to אָוֶן; in Ps. 94:20, it is parallel to הַוּוֹת; in Prov. 24:2, it is parallel to שֹׁד; in Ps. 7:15, it is collocated with אָוֶן and שָׁקֶר; and in Hab.1:13, it is parallel to רָע.[260] Thus עָמָל itself can be regarded as futile. However, it is not clear whether Qohelet calls wealth or toil futile. It seems that he warns against excessive effort rather than materialism. However, he does not advocate materialism. He sees that one hand full in peace is better than two hands full in toil (4:6). In 2:24, he says "There is nothing better for a man than eating and drinking and making his soul to see something good by means of his wealth (עָמָל)". Wealth is only a means to the end.

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[258]Gese (1983), 146.
[259]Schoors (1992), 194.
[260]Fox (1989), 54.

Kugel sees the relationship between כֶּסֶף (money) and יִתְרוֹן in 7:12 as "capital asset" and "income from assets".[261] He does not follow the accentuation of the Masoretic text. He thinks that ויתרון דעת החכמה is not one long construct, but that a major pause comes between יִתְרוֹן and the next word.[262] According to Kugel, 7:12 can be interpreted as follows: He who has gained wisdom, has acquired money and profit; the knowledge of wisdom keeps its possessors alive.[263] Murphy, however, follows the Masoretic accentuation and translates: "For the protection of wisdom is (as) the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom keeps its owner alive".[264] In fact, the two interpretations are not all that different. Both consider wisdom as superior over money or wealth. Kugel's interpretation suggests that wisdom will bring about money and profit, while Murphy's interpretation suggests that while keeping wisdom is keeping money, wisdom has more advantage. As far as I know no scholar has yet followed Kugel's interpretation. However, Kugel's interpretation suggests that profit or financial gain was very important in Qohelet's time. People did not just work for a living. They worked hard for a significant return. It is an on-going process; wealth brings more wealth. The rich never have enough.

Qohelet points out that it is true that wealth can be earned by a person's labour, but it is also true that he who does not labour may also realise benefit (2:21). Wealth does not only belong to the diligent. Many things that happen to people not only depend on the way they do things, but also on time and chance (3:1-8). He emphasises this fact and asks a rhetorical question of those who hold to one side of the coin: What advantage does the worker get from what he has laboured? (3:9).

Qohelet not only considers עָמָל in a negative sense but he sees the value of עָמָל as a source of pleasure. In 2:10, Qohelet says "I delighted in all my labour". Qohelet suggests that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink and to enjoy all the wealth for which he has laboured under the sun during the few days of life which God gave him, for it is his lot (חֶלְקוֹ), which is from God's hand or a gift of God (מֵאֵת אֱלֹהִים).[265]. For without God no one can eat or find enjoyment (2:25). Seeing the relationship between portions and God's giving, Zimmerli comments that since God gives according to his will, human beings should seize what God gives in every moment and be glad of the portion that God gives.[266] It is interesting to note that when Qohelet mentions עָמָל in a positive sense, he does not use the root יתר as the effect of

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[261]Kugel (1989), 44.
[262]Kugel (1989) 43.
[263]Kugel (1989), 44.
[264]Murphy (1992), 60.
[265]See 2:24; 3:13; 5:17-18.
[266]Zimmerli (1964), 157.

labour. Instead, he uses the noun חֵלֶק (2:10; 5:17-18; 9:9), the phrase מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים (2:24) and מַתַּת הָאֱלֹהִים (3:13; 5:18). The word חֵלֶק seems to be used by Qohelet as a reward for labour. Zimmerli suggests that the word חֵלֶק bears in the sayings of Ecclesiastes a notion of limitation for he sees that God gives only a portion and retains the whole.[267] Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the word חֵלֶק can have a spiritual meaning, as suggested by Von Rad. He says, "The expression 'Jahweh is my portion' occurs quite a number of times in connexion with the spiritualised idea of asylum and has a long prehistory".[268] But Qohelet uses this word in the physical sense.[269] In 2:21, the portion can be transferred from one who works for it to another who does not labour for it. Moreover we cannot find in Ecclesiastes any distinction between the material realm and the spiritual realm. Indeed, the portion not only refers to possessions, but also to the potential for experiencing pleasure.[270] The portion in life includes the potential to have emotions such as love, hatred, and jealousy (9:6). Besides eating, drinking, and enjoyment, man's lot includes a sexual relationship with a woman–presumably his wife (9:9).[271] The advice given in 9:9 offers us a clue that Qohelet's audience was exclusively male.[272] Similarly, Buddhist teachings in Thailand are exclusively for the male. Females are not allowed to be ordained. In contrast to Qohelet's advice, Buddhists consider the portion described by Qohelet as arising from desire, which is the cause of suffering.[273] This philosophy is seen in Thailand where a monk cannot eat anything after 12 am. (he can eat only in the morning), cannot drink alcohol at all, should not laugh out loud, and cannot have sexual relationships with his own wife after becoming a monk. I will offer more contrasts in another chapter.

For Qohelet, God is fully involved in distributing human portions. Fox comments, "A portion is, so to speak, a claim-chit, which God may give or take away". Thus having a portion does not necessarily entail being allowed to "take" it, to derive benefit from it as shown in 5:18.[274] God may give riches without permitting a person to enjoy them (6:2). A portion, as having a right to enjoy life, is not a

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[267]Zimmerli (1964), 157.
[268]Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (1962), Vol. I, 403.
[269]Cf. Fox (1989), 59.
[270]Fox (1989), 59.
[271]The *RSV* has "wife", while the *NEB* has "woman". Both translations are possible. Gordis [(1968), 306] sees that אשה with the article omitted means "woman", and not "wife". Murphy [(1992), 93] suggests that the lack of the definite article before אִשָּׁה does not indicate that Qohelet means any woman at all, but has one's wife in mind (cf. Prov. 5:18-19). Rashbam also understand it to refer to "wife" for he has אשתך "your wife" in his commentary on Qohelet [Japhet and Salters (1985), 182-183].
[272]Crenshaw (1987), 163.
[273]De Silva (1987), 128.
[274]Fox (1989), 59.

completed gift from God unless God allows one to enjoy his portion. In 5:19 joy (שִׂמְחָה) is affirmed as a divine gift, and is an response to human labour if מַעֲנֶה is translated as "answer", instead of "occupy".[275] Murphy argues that מַעֲנֶה is the hiphil participle of ענה, and he points out that the hiphil form is also found in Prov. 29:19 and Job 32:17 to mean "answer".[276] Whitley suggests that it is likely that it has the second meaning of the root which is "occupy with" as in 1:13 and 3:10 where it is likewise followed by the preposition ב.[277] Rashbam indicates that מענה is hiphil and denotes rejoicing and singing as in Ex. 15:21 and Deut. 31:21.[278] From these various alternatives, we can see that Qohelet seems to prefer using a single root with a rich meaning. It is not easy to decide which meaning Qohelet intended. Most scholars recognise that the word מַעֲנֶה in 5:19 relates to the root ענה in 1:13 and 3:10. The context of 1:13 and 3:10 suggests toil, strain, and struggle, so the root ענה can be interpreted as "afflicted by" (Gordis) or as "occupied with" (Rashbam). In 5:19, however, the context expresses ease and happiness, so the word מַעֲנֶה, from the same root, can be interpreted as "answer" or "sing". Qohelet seems to use the hiphil form to indicate a shift in meaning. The many nuances of the root ענה help us to see that responses to עָמָל can be both positive and negative.

From the evidence mentioned above, the root עמל is used to refer to the work of human beings in general, but in particular is used to describe the ambitious spirit of a certain group of people, namely that of the Jewish aristocratic circles influenced by Hellenistic culture.[279] Many times Qohelet reminds his reader of the frailty of human labour. The limitation of human labour is explicitly expressed in Ps. 90:10; 127:1-2; Job 7:1-3, but Qohelet seems to emphasise this point more than others. Qohelet probably wanted to warn the traders who lived in the Ptolemaic age. De Jong comments: "Enjoyment and wealth were of course things to be striven after in every culture and time, but this applies especially to the Hellenistic period".[280] In many contexts, the connotation of עמל includes labour, inflicted toil, and on-going effort of traders or the rich who are looking for profit (יִתְרוֹן). Qohelet, however, suggests that they should accept their portion (חֵלֶק) instead. There are four possible results of the toil of these people:

1) no rest

2) no profit

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[275]See Murphy (1992), 47, 53.
[276]Murphy (1992), 47-48. Cf. Gordis (1968), 255-256; Lohfink (1990), 626.
[277]Whitley (1979), 56.
[278]Japhet and Salters (1985), 142-143.
[279]De Jong (1994), 90.
[280]De Jong (1994), 93.

3) wealth without the ability to enjoy

4) wealth with the ability to enjoy.

God is the one who is behind each of these outcomes.

The Usage of עָשָׂה in Ecclesiastes

The verb עָשָׂה occurs 16 times, and its noun מַעֲשֶׂה 15 times in Ecclesiastes. The meaning of the verb עָשָׂה is not so specific as the verb עָמַל. עָשָׂה can mean "to work", "to do", "to make", or "to commit", or "to execute" depending on the context. This verb is used more generally than עָמַל. God can be the subject of עָשָׂה, but he is never the subject of עָמַל. There are at least six times[281] that this verb is used in the passive (niphal) form. For example:

וְשָׂנֵאתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים כִּי רַע עָלַי **הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה** תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־הַכֹּל הֶבֶל
וּרְעוּת רוּחַ׃

I hated life because the deed which is done under the sun is evil to me. For all is futility and chasing after the wind (Eccl. 2:17).

אֲשֶׁר אֵין־**נַעֲשָׂה** פִתְגָם **מַעֲשֶׂה** הָרָעָה מְהֵרָה עַל־כֵּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם בָּהֶם
לַעֲשׂוֹת רֵע׃

When the judgement over the evil deed is not executed quickly, the heart of a human being is bold to do evil (Eccl. 8:11).

וְרָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־**מַעֲשֵׂה** הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי לֹא יוּכַל הָאָדָם לִמְצוֹא אֶת־**הַמַּעֲשֶׂה** אֲשֶׁר
נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בְּשֶׁל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֹל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא יִמְצָא וְגַם אִם־יֹאמַר
הֶחָכָם לָדַעַת לֹא יוּכַל לִמְצֹא׃

Then I came to realise about all God's deeds that man cannot comprehend the deed which is done under the sun. However hard a man may try, he cannot find out. Even if the wise man claims to know, he cannot discover (Eccl. 8:17).

Whenever this verb is used in the niphal form in Ecclesiastes, it is hard to discern the subject. The niphal of עשה is quite often used in contexts which suggest that some evil things are being done (4:3; 8:9, 11, 14). In the context of 1:13-14, the phrase "everything that is done under the sun" in 1:14 points to the term "evil business" in 1:13.[282] It is not clear who takes the responsibility. Qohelet seems to be reluctant to say that God is responsible, using the passive form instead of the active. However, in 8:17, it seems as if God is the one who takes responsibility, because Qohelet says,

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[281] 2:17; 4:3; 8:9, 11, 14, 17.

[282] Hayman (1991), 98.

"Then I came to realise about all God's deeds that man cannot comprehend the deed which is done under the sun". Qohelet immediately rephrases אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים as אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ.[283] All God's deeds and the thing done under the sun refer to the same thing. Again he says, "...so you will not know the deed of God who does everything" (11:5). From these two passages, we can see that Qohelet thinks God takes full responsibility for everything that happens in this world. In 7:14, Qohelet says that God made both good and evil days. Qohelet recognises that both good and bad events come from God. He does not try to defend God like all the friends of Job do. They seem to think that only good things come from God. They think that Job suffers because of his sin. In contrast Qohelet does not try to explain the cause of suffering or the cause of injustice. According to Qohelet God has freedom to act, but Job's friends push God back into the setting of the order known by the sages.[284] He considers that the answer to human suffering is beyond human wisdom. Qohelet seems to come to terms with the situation. In sharp contrast to Job, there is no sign of any attack on God, of any rebellion against a relationship of God to man which bears no resemblance at all to that known in old Israel.[285] At the end of 8:17, Qohelet says: "Even if the wise man says he knows (wisdom), he is not able to fathom". Zimmerli thinks Qohelet is in conflict with the Wisdom School for he openly challenges them as this verse shows.[286] It seems that Qohelet might have been referring to the metaphysical speculations of Hellenistic philosophy.[287] This philosophy was already well-known by the middle of the third century in Judaean aristocratic circles.[288]

Another interesting observation is that the niphal of עָשָׂה is often used in juxtaposition with the phrase תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ (1:14; 2:17; 4:3; 8:9, 17). Gammie points out that the phrase "under the sun" performs a three-fold function in the book:

> (i) it emphasizes the monotony of earthly existence with its seemingly endless cycles of nature ("there is nothing new under the sun" [1:9]); (ii) it serves to underline the earth-bound nature of man and his utter impotence to search out the divine mind and purpose (3:10-15); (iii) in view of the last chapters of the book where, among other things, the loss of sight is listed among the calamities of old age (11:8; 12:2, 3), the expression "under the sun" in the earlier chapters unexpectedly emerges as a reminder of vitality and vigor.[289]

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[283]Hayman (1991), 98.
[284]Zimmerli (1964), 155.
[285]Von Rad (1972), 233.
[286]Zimmerli (1964), 155.
[287]De Jong (1994), 93.
[288]De Jong (1994), 93.
[289]Gammie (1974), 363.

It seems that in the context of 1:14; 2:17; 4:3; 8:9, 17 the second function of the phrase "under the sun" is intended. Hayman points out that there is no discernible difference between 'the business which God has given to human beings' (3:10) and 'everything that is done under the sun' (1:14).[290] God does not expect human beings to understand everything he gives them as a task. Servants or slaves have no right to question their masters' command even though they think them absurd. The phrase "the deed done under the sun" seems to refer to the mysterious work which God gives human beings to do in this world.

For Qohelet, working is part and parcel of human life. It is not a punishment from God, though when he uses the term עָמַל, he seems to give us the impression that overwork does not always produce the expected rewards. Consider what he says in 9:10:

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ **לַעֲשׂוֹת** בְּכֹחֲךָ **עֲשֵׂה** כִּי אֵין **מַעֲשֶׂה** וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן וְדַעַת
וְחָכְמָה בִּשְׁאוֹל אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הֹלֵךְ שָׁמָּה׃

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with (all) your might, because there is neither deed nor thought nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol where you are going (Eccl. 9:10).

An interesting phrase in this verse is "do it with your might". Instead of עָמַל he uses לַעֲשׂוֹת with בְּכֹחֲךָ. As mentioned above the connotation of עָמַל points toward working harder than עָשָׂה or even working too much. On the other hand עָשָׂה seems to be neutral, so the word כֹּחַ is added to enforce the idea of diligence or using full potential. Qohelet upholds the virtue of work, but not the idea of overwork, which is what he means by "toil". Qohelet thinks that working routinely is not sufficient. He suggests that each person should use his potential to the fullest because the only chance for him to work is when he is still alive. Working is a characteristic of the living. According to Qohelet, there is no work in Sheol after one dies. This description of Sheol is classic; it portrays a state of non-life.[291] The setting of verse 10 is one (9:5-10) in which Qohelet emphasises the living. Every action done in this life has already (כבר) won God's favour (9:7). The "already" here may refer to God's intention in his creation. It does not refer to the immediate past of the person who does the action, because in this context Qohelet does not distinguish between good deeds and bad deeds. The word עָשָׂה, in this context, seems to refer to the occupation or skill of human beings. This means that working is part of the enjoyment one will get in this life. Working can realise the aim of human life. Note the special meaning of עָשָׂה in 2:2

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[290]Hayman (1991), 98.
[291]Murphy (1992), 93. Cf. Crenshaw (1987), 163.

which can be interpreted as "accomplish"[292] or "achieve".[293] That is, working should aim for achievement. The phrase "your hand finds to do" is a Hebrew idiom equivalent to the modern phrase "utilise your abilities to the fullest".

The noun מַעֲשֶׂה sometimes occurs with the verb עָשָׂה especially in the special phrase "the deed which is done under the sun" (הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ).[294] This noun generally means "work" or "deed" or "action", but sometimes like עָמָל, it can mean "wealth" or "possession" depending on the context. For example:

וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עָמָל וְאֶת כָּל־כִּשְׁרוֹן **הַמַּעֲשֶׂה** כִּי הִיא קִנְאַת־אִישׁ מֵרֵעֵהוּ
גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ׃
And I saw all the toil and all the skill of the work that it is a man's rivalry of his neighbor. This also is futility and chasing after the wind (Eccl. 4:4).

אַל־תִּתֵּן אֶת־פִּיךָ לַחֲטִיא אֶת־בְּשָׂרֶךָ וְאַל־תֹּאמַר לִפְנֵי הַמַּלְאָךְ כִּי שְׁגָגָה הִיא
לָמָּה יִקְצֹף הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־קוֹלֶךָ וְחִבֵּל **אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה** יָדֶיךָ׃
Do not let your mouth make you sin, and do not say to the messenger that "It was a mistake". Why should God be angry at your voice (or what you say) and destroy the work of your hands? (Eccl. 5:5).

The meaning of מַעֲשֶׂה is not clear in 4:4, but it implies "wealth", since man's rivalry with his neighbor is not over the quantity of work done, but the amount of wealth gained from that work. However, in 5:5, the meaning of "wealth" or "property" is clearly indicated, as something that can be destroyed.

The most interesting phrase in which this noun occurs is "the deed of God" (מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים). This phrase also occurs in other parts of the Old Testament. Created things are said to be the "work" of God (Ps.19:2; Job 34:19). It is frequently used of the high points of divine activity, especially in the Psalms (66:3; 92:6; 111:2, 7; 118:17).[295] But Qohelet uses this phrase in his own way without referring to the saving acts of God in Israel's history. His concern is more with the acts of God in the perspective of shared human experience. God is in control of everything done in this world. For example:

אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְעִתּוֹ גַּם אֶת־הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְצָא
הָאָדָם **אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה** הָאֱלֹהִים מֵרֹאשׁ וְעַד־סוֹף׃

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[292]Crenshaw (1987), 69.
[293]Murphy (1992), 16.
[294]Cf. 2:17; 4:3; 8:9, 17.
[295]Murphy (1979), 238.

He made everything beautiful in its time. He also put ignorance (or hidden things)[296] in their hearts in order that man cannot find the deed which God has done from the beginning to the end (Eccl. 3:11).

רְאֵה **אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה** הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עִוְּתוֹ׃
See the deed of God: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? (Eccl. 7:13).

כַּאֲשֶׁר אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ מַה־דֶּרֶךְ הָרוּחַ כַּעֲצָמִים בְּבֶטֶן הַמְלֵאָה כָּכָה לֹא תֵדַע
אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר **יַעֲשֶׂה** אֶת־הַכֹּל׃
Just as you do not know the way of the life-force, and how the bones (are formed) in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you will not know the deed of God who does everything (Eccl. 11:5).

Some scholars suggest that Qohelet despairs because God has withdrawn after he created this world.[297] However, from 3:11, we can see that creation is an ongoing event (notice the phrase "in its time"), and that God is in control from beginning until end. Crenshaw is not certain whether Qohelet has the creation story in mind because Qohelet uses the verb עָשָׂה instead of בָּרָא and יָפֶה instead of טוֹב.[298] However, the creation story in Gen. 1 and 2 uses both עָשָׂה and בָּרָא to refer to God's acts in creation (see especially Gen. 1:31; 2:2-4). Moreover, עָשָׂה occurs 24 times while בָּרָא occurs only 16 times in Is. 40-55. Both are used as divine "creation" terms.[299] In his thesis, Lee points out that among the three most popular terms in the middle chapters (40-55), only עָשָׂה maintains its frequency of use in the rest of the book (24 times in chapter 1-39 and ten times in chapters 56-66).[300] There is no doubt that when God is the subject of עָשָׂה, this word refers to God's "creation" act.[301] Qohelet does not use the verb בָּרָא. The root ברא occurs only once in Eccl. 12:1. There is a dispute among scholars about the meaning of the word בְּחוּרֹתֶיךָ because many regard the reference to creator as unexpected and unlikely, and propose other readings.[302] For Qohelet, God did not just create the world and leave it. Even though God is in heaven, he still responds to the utterance of humans on earth (5:1, 5). The difficulty Qohelet is facing is not the absence of God, but the way God does things in this world. He cannot understand God's action and he does not think anyone else can understand it either.

Not only are they unable to understand God's deeds, human beings are not able to change what God has already done as shown in 3:14:

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[296]See Eccl. 12:14 where עלם can mean "to hide, obscure". See also Whitley (1979), 31-33.
[297]Childs (1985), 232.
[298]Crenshaw (1987), 97.
[299]Lee, *Creation and Redemption in Isaiah 40-55* (1993), 3.
[300]Lee, *Creation and Redemption in Isaiah 40-55* (1993), 3.
[301]Cf. Hayman (1991). 96.
[302]For detail of other readings, see Murphy (1992), 113.

יָדַעְתִּי כִּי כָל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם עָלָיו אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּמִמֶּנּוּ אֵין לִגְרֹעַ וְהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה שֶׁיִּרְאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו׃

I know that everything God does will be forever. It is impossible to add to it and it is impossible to subtract from it. God has made it in order that they will fear him.

The word לְעוֹלָם indicates that what God does belong to the realm of the permanent and unchangeable.[303] Human beings do not have power to change divine deeds. This verse reinforces what is mentioned in 1:15. Although God is not mentioned in the saying, his presence is felt.[304] The root עשׂה not only refers to divine creation, but also refers to his power. In 3:17, Qohelet says, "God will judge both the righteous and the wicked, for there is time for every activity and for every deed". The final part of 3:14 shows that the purpose of God's actions is to have human beings fear him. Lee observes:

> Our survey of the 48 occurrences of ברא in the Hebrew Bible shows that YHWH as the supreme creator not only manifests his mastery over the physical universe, for his absolute authority is equally efficacious over friends or foes. Moreover, when YHWH is portrayed as Israel's creator, it indicates not so much a special relationship but YHWH's sovereign control over everything happening to his people. Furthermore, the five examples where ברא is explicitly linked with the root חדשׁ do not necessarily imply a semantic identification between the two, for in every one of them the motif of YHWH's power is present as well. As a result, we may now draw the final conclusion that a consistent understanding of the verb ברא does point definitively to the connotations of YHWH's sovereign power and control.[305]

What Lee says about ברא is also true about עשׂה in Ecclesiastes when God is the subject of this verb. God has full authority to do anything in this world. The proper response to his sovereign power is to fear him rather than to ask him for an explanation.

From the evidence mentioned above, we can see that the nuance of the root עשׂה in Ecclesiastes is quite broad. God and human beings can be the subject of the verb. Most of the time that niphal form is used the implication is that God is the subject of the verb. Though the connotation of עשׂה points toward "work" in general, Qohelet frequently uses it to refer to divine creation. Compared to the root עמל, the root עשׂה is neutral, but its niphal tends to point toward unpleasant events happening in the world.

The Relationship of עָמָל and עָשָׂה

Both עמל and עשׂה are in the same semantic field. Their general meanings both include the terms "work", "deed", "do", "act" and "wealth". Yet the aspect of divine

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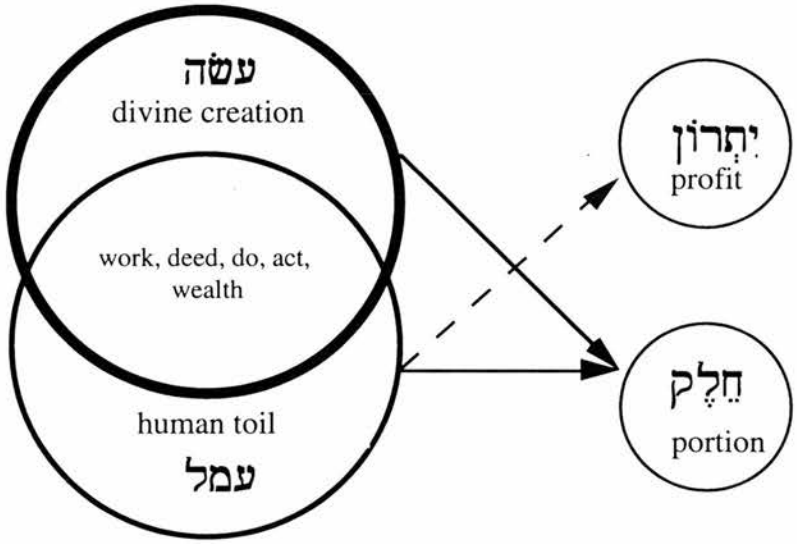
[303]Murphy (1992), 35.
[304]Murphy (1992), 14.
[305]Lee, "Power not Novelty", (1993), 210-211.

creation, which is communicated by עשׂה, and the aspect of human toil, which is communicated by עמל, are not shared by the two roots. From the specific uses of the two roots, we can see that God gives a "portion" to human beings but some of them ambitiously look for profit and thus are unhappy. If they accepted their "portion" as a gift of God for their work, they would be happy. The diagram below illustrates the relationship between these two roots and also shows a picture of the relationship between the expectation of human beings and the approval of God.



The understanding of the way Qohelet uses these two roots, especially the idea of the expectation of human beings from their hard work and the fact that God gives his gift to them according to his free will, enables us to compare Qohelet's idea with the Law of *Kamma* (cause and effect) in Buddhism. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

Chapter Seven

The Teachings of Ecclesiastes

In the previous chapter we investigated some important key words used in Ecclesiastes. It is clear that Qohelet purposely selects certain words to express his ideas. Although a learned man who was aware of a wide variety of issues, Qohelet emphasised certain topics which are central to an understanding of his thinking. He does not write about Israel as God's chosen people, about salvation history, for instance. Qohelet is more concerned with human life on a universal level rather than a national level. In this chapter I will deal with three subjects: the concept of God, the idea of enjoying life and the idea of death. These three topics are essential for understanding Qohelet's views on human life.

The Concept of God

In the previous chapter we saw that Qohelet considers God as the creator, with the power to do anything he wants in this world. Though the holy Tetragrammaton (*YHWH*) is never used in Ecclesiastes, Qohelet mentions God at least 39 times.[1] Though the number of occurrences is significant, Michel suggests that our understanding of Qohelet's view on God should depend not on the fact that Qohelet mentions God so frequently, but on the way in which he mentions God.[2] Despite seeing prevalent problems in the world, Qohelet does not question God's existence. Gordis comments:

> The modern reader might expect that Koheleth would be led by his views to deny the existence of God, but that was impossible to an ancient mind, and especially to a Jew. Even the Epicureans, who denied the gods' intervention in human affairs as a fundamental element of their outlook, did not deny their being. In the ancient world, atheism, the denial of God, referred to the view that the gods did not intervene in human affairs. Koheleth, a son of Israel, reared on the words of the Torah, the prophets and the Sages, could not doubt the reality of God for an instant. For him, the existence of the world was tantamount to the existence of God.[3]

Qohelet always refers to God by the word אֱלֹהִים, mostly with the article.[4] אֱלֹהִים refers to God in a more general way than *YHWH*. Boström points out: "In Ecclesiastes there seems to be a conscious effort to refer to and describe the deity in

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[1]The Septuagint has θεος 40 times because it seems to interpret הַמַּלְאָךְ in 5:5 as God.

[2]Michel, "Gott bei Kohelet", 32.

[3]Gordis (1982), 122.

[4]There are only seven instances in which the article is not used (1:13; 3:10, 13; 5:18; 7:18; 8:2, 13).

very general terms".[5] Qohelet's idea of God is similar to the understanding of the early wisdom tradition. Crenshaw points out:

> The early wisdom did not understand YHWH as a patron deity who had entered into an intimate relationship with the nation Israel or any of its official representatives. Instead, YHWH functioned as a precise equivalent of El or Elohim, the more general names for God.[6]

If Qohelet had mentioned the name יהוה; then it would have been easier to understand God's nature. Walsh observes:

> Qoheleth does not for a moment question the existence of God. He is most definitely the power behind all that is and all that happens. But he is not the "Yahweh" revealed in Israel's religious traditions. Qoheleth never uses the divine name. He is a God whose nature is as inscrutable and unpredictable as the universe he controls. There is no way to tell whether he is good or evil, loving or hateful (9:1). The only thing that can be deduced is that God himself is responsible for our human state of unknowing; i.e., God is not simply hidden, he is hiding (3:10-11).[7]

From what we read in Ecclesiastes, there is no mention of the direct contact between God and human beings. This absence causes some scholars to suggest that God in Qohelet's view is distant from human beings. Crenshaw states, "the knowledge of this distance is the key to the understanding of the book of Qoheleth".[8] In Ecclesiastes, there is no specific divine intervention, but rather a more general kind of intervention owing to God's will for humanity. However, Qohelet has no doubt about God's active role in life ("For to the man whom he pleases, he gives wisdom and knowledge and joy..." 2:26; cf. 3:17; 7:26; 11:9).[9] Qohelet seems to agree with Ancient Israel who had recognised a gulf between man and God, but had believed that the distance was spanned by a Lord who was active in the lives of his people.[10] Though Qohelet may not be able to explain how God reaches out to human beings, he is convinced that God does not leave human beings alone because he believes that everything comes from God (11:5).[11] On twelve occasions God is said to "give".[12] On seven occasions mankind is said to have a joyful "portion" from God.[13] God is still active and involved

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[5]Boström (1990), 32. He also indicates that the frequent preference for generic or indeterminate expressions when referring to the deity is a characteristic of wisdom theology, Egyptian instructions and Mesopotamian wisdom texts.

[6]Crenshaw, "The Concept of God in Old Testament Wisdom", (1993), 7-8.

[7]Walsh, (1982), 47.

[8]Crenshaw (1974), 44.

[9]Murphy (1975), 122.

[10]Crenshaw (1974), 45.

[11]In 7:14, Qohelet seems to indicate that both prosperity and adversity come from God.

[12]The word נָתַן occurs 25 times in Ecclesiastes. In 1:13, God gives a burdensome task to human beings (cf. 3:10). In 5:17-18, God gives wealth and the ability to enjoy life.

[13]Eccl. 2:10,21; 3:22; 5:18, 19; 9:6,9.

in human affairs. Comparing the role of God in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, Boström states:

> The book of Ecclesiastes exhibits a profound belief in God's sovereignty through the repeated declaration that his designs for the world are irrevocable, inscrutable to man, and the controlling factor in man's life situation. In addition references to God's activity in the present also depict him as acting sovereignly to accomplish his will and establish justice. The theme and theological implications of Ecclesiastes 7:27 [26] are similar to Proverbs 22:14. The relationship between God's activity and man's is the topic addressed in 7:14, with the fundamental difference that here it is abundantly clear that man is unable to change anything that God already has done, while in Proverbs God tends to be portrayed more as intervening when human action contradicts his purposes rather than as strictly determining the course of events.[14]

Boström further explains the meaning of Prov. 22:14 by indicating that the person who is trapped by the adulteress hardly knows that the ultimate reason for his bad fortune is God's displeasure with him and he cannot distinguish between what he himself has caused and what is the result of God's activity.[15] However, Boström does not explain the meaning of Eccl. 7:26. Actually, it is not easy to interpret this passage for we do not know whether Qohelet is talking about women in general or about a particular type of woman. Gordis thinks Qohelet refers to women in general.[16] By contrast, Loader thinks Qohelet refers to the loose woman about whom we hear so often in wisdom literature, usually in a general sense (e.g., Prov. 2:16-19; 5:1ff.; 7:6ff.; 23:27-28).[17] Ogden tries to resolve the ambiguity of the word הָאִשָּׁה by interpreting it figuratively as "premature death".[18] However, Ogden's suggestion does not help in solving the problem because both the righteous and the wicked experience premature death in 7:16-17. Whybray suggests that the phrase "woman is more bitter than death" may be a quotation from a conventional saying.[19] If this is the case, Qohelet may refer to the loose woman. Hence Qohelet's idea of God's intervention in Eccl. 7:26 would be similar to Prov. 22:14.

When we compare Eccl. 7:26 with Prov. 22:14, we can see that the phrase "he who is under the Lord's wrath will fall unto it" in Prov. 22:14 carries the same connotation with the phrase "the sinner will be captured by her" in Eccl. 7:26. Both passages imply that God is intervening in the personal affairs of human beings. Basing his views on Eccl. 7:14, Boström thinks that Qohelet's concept of God differs from that of the author of Proverbs in the sense that man is unable to change anything that

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[14]Boström (1990), 178-179.
[15]Boström (1990), 170.
[16]Gordis (1968), 282. Cf. Gibson (1994), § 31c.
[17]Loader (1986), 92.
[18]Ogden (1987), 121.
[19]Whybray (1989), 125.

God already has done. But if we continue to read 7:15-17, we can see that anyone who is either overly wicked or overly righteous will die prematurely. Human actions can cause a change in the course of events. The person who is pleasing God (טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים) in 7:26 is probably not the righteous man or the wise man in 7:16. This person seems to be the same kind of person found in 2:26 "the one who pleases God" (טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים). In the entire Hebrew Bible, the phrase טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים occurs only in Eccl. 2:26 and 7:26.[20] Therefore it is not easy to ascertain the nuance of this phrase. The only passage in the Old Testament that may help us to deduce the meaning of the phrase טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים is 1 Sam. 29:9 where Achish said to David: "I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God (יָדַעְתִּי כִּי טוֹב אַתָּה בְּעֵינַי כְּמַלְאַךְ אֱלֹהִים)". The context of this verse suggests that Achish approved of or trusted David. It does not indicate that the word טוֹב had any ethical content. Gordis interprets טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, in Eccl. 2:26 and 7:26 as representing the person who seeks happiness wisely.[21] Murphy also thinks that the terms טוב and חוטא in 7:26 are best understood as in 2:26, not as moral qualifications, but as designations of human beings in terms of the inscrutable divine will.[22] It seems that Qohelet does not think that God has strictly determined the course of events. Clearly, Qohelet does not look from God's point of view, but looks backward from the result to the cause of events. Since Qohelet sees some people ensnared by a woman, while others are not, he thinks that those who are not ensnared must be favoured by God.[23] Qohelet is not able to explain how they gain God's favour. Probably God picks them randomly or they may fear God so he protects them. Qohelet admits that there is much injustice done in this world and God seems to allow crime to increase for he sees that the sentence is not quickly carried out (8:11). Though he does not understand why God allows wicked men to get what righteous men deserve (8:14), Qohelet does not try to explain this difficulty by separating the world into two spheres. He seems to accept the world as it is. Gese comments:

> It is important, however, to understand that despite this humanity-world discrepancy, Koheleth comes neither to a dualism which separates completely between an outer and an inner sphere nor to one which sees a unity of the two spheres by means of analogy. Later wisdom took this spiritualizing or transcendental route, but Koheleth on the contrary held fast to a *single* world in which God accomplishes and orders all things. He does not elevate human difficulty to the postulate of a sphere of being, even though he dogs its trail so radically and

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[20]We can find the phrase טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה in Deut. 6:18; 12:28; Prov. 3:4; 2 Chron. 14:1. However, these passages refer to things done by a person rather than to the person himself.

[21]Gordis (1968), 282.

[22]Murphy (1992), 76.

[23]Similar logic can be found in Prov. 18:22: מָצָא אִשָּׁה מָצָא טוֹב וַיָּפֶק רָצוֹן מֵיְהוָה.

> fundamentally, but charges the individual to abandon this experienced estrangement.[24]

Qohelet tries to investigate the relationship between God and human beings from several different perspectives. Not surprisingly, therefore, we find some inconsistency with regard to the concept of God in Ecclesiastes. He does not present us with one consistent view of God. Rather, he shows all aspects of God, having been a careful observer throughout his life. He reports everything he has found, though he cannot give any concrete reason for each phenomenon. Michel points out that God, for Qohelet, is utterly present and at the same time utterly absent.[25] Qohelet recognises God's presence because he considers every event as "God's deed" and God's absence because human beings cannot grasp what God's will is; all the events are incomprehensible.[26] There is no clear guidance from God. Human beings try to seek Him for direction, but He does not answer. In Ecclesiastes, God does not directly address human beings. God seems to be completely distant from human beings because the personal and redeeming encounters are not found in Ecclesiastes.[27] Though human beings may have a rough idea of God's purpose for them (eat, drink and enjoy), they do not know God's specific plan at any particular time. When they do not get a response from God, they feel that God is absent.

The idea of God's absence also can be found in other parts of the Old Testament. The tone which comes through from statements of God's personal absence in the Old Testament is one of alarm. The author of Ps. 22 cries in anguish:

> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
> Why are you so far from saving me,
> so far from the words of my groaning?
> O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
> by night, and am not silent.
>
> Ps. 22:1-2 (*NIV*).

Similarly, Asaph the author of Ps. 74 cries:

> Why have you rejected us forever, O God?
> Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture?
> Remember the people you purchased of old,
> the tribe of your inheritance, whom you redeemed–Mount Zion, where you dwelt.
>
> Ps. 74:1-2 (*NIV*).

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[24]Gese (1983), 148.

[25]Michel, "Gott bei Kohelet", 34.

[26]Michel, "Gott bei Kohelet", 34.

[27]Michel, "Gott bei Kohelet", 34. In other parts of the Old Testament, there are personal encounters between God and human beings, for examples: God and Abraham; God and Moses; God and Samuel. In the book of Exodus, God redeems the Israelites from Egypt.

Despite his firm commitment to God, Job cannot stand God's silence. Job wants to bring his case to God as he replied to Zophar:

> But I desire to speak to the Almighty
> and to argue my case with God...
> Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;
> I will surely defend my ways to his face.
>
> Job. 13:3, 15 (*NIV*).

But Job also has the problem of locating God:

> Even today my complaint is bitter;
> his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning.
> If only I knew where to find him;
> if only I could go to his dwelling!
> I would state my case before him
> and fill my mouth with arguments.
>
> Job. 23:2-4 (*NIV*).

Toward the end of the book, Job finally has an opportunity to get a response from God (38:1-41:34). God has now appeared and the situation has changed. God's appearance, it seems, is sufficient vindication for Job; he does not press for a formal deed of exculpation.[28] Though God did not respond to all Job's requests, Job is satisfied with the opportunity to meet God face to face. Accordingly, he withdraws his case and does not submit to further interrogation (42:6).[29] Goldingay points out that the book of Job does find some solution to the problem it faces through a theophany, a special revelation.[30] However, theophany is a distinctly un-empirical and extremely uncommon phenomenon. So Job only solves the problem by looking outside the wisdom tradition from which it begins.[31] Qohelet does not request special revelation from God. He seems to accept that God has already revealed what human beings need to know through His creation. Ecclesiastes is Job without the theophany.[32] Qohelet refuses to solve the problem by miraculous means. He inclines toward using wisdom to solve the problem. Goldingay thinks that Qohelet is more rigorous in his unremitting insistence on a verifiable world-view.[33] Since wisdom cannot provide all the answers, Qohelet leaves some of his questions open. He does not try to provide all the answers. Qohelet does not seek theophany but accepts the power of God who is invisible (3:10-11).

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[28]Habel (1985), 34.
[29]Habel (1985), 34.
[30]Goldingay (1979), 199.
[31]Goldingay (1979), 199.
[32]Goldingay (1979), 199.
[33]Goldingay (1979), 199.

Though Qohelet is not able to resolve the reality of God's presence and God's absence, he is able to give sound advice to his audience. In Eccl. 5:1, Qohelet seems to suggest that God is distant from human beings for he says, "God is in heaven and you are on earth". Davidson interprets this to mean that, for Qohelet, God has been banished to heaven, and He is no longer in any danger of interfering.[34] Davidson's interpretation is not consistent with Eccl. 5:5 where Qohelet seems to suggest that God is near and has power to interfere for he warns: "Why should God be angry with your voice, and destroy the work of your hands?". Though God is distant in person, His power and authority are present; He can, and does punish human beings. The context of 5:1-6 shows this truth. It seems that people in Qohelet's time were anxious to seek God's blessing by making unthinking vows. Then, they took God lightly by ignoring what they had promised. Qohelet warns them that God can destroy their work if they do not fulfill their vows. According to Qohelet God is too far away for human beings to understand, but divine retribution is near. Though elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, Qohelet finds no intelligible retribution or justice in life,[35] he thinks that retribution does exist.[36] Therefore we should fear God (5:6). The social and political order in Qohelet's period might have changed, but he does not think that God has changed His standard.

Despite living in this period of cultural change, Qohelet sees "nothing new under the sun" (1:9). Qohelet denies any distinction between the past and the future.[37] Qohelet seems to differ from those who hold to the eschatological viewpoint and hope for a new age when things will become better. Qohelet's view of the world seems to be consistent with the way he views God. In Eccl. 3:14-15, Qohelet states:

יָדַעְתִּי כִּי כָל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם עָלָיו אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּמִמֶּנּוּ
אֵין לִגְרֹעַ וְהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה שֶׁיִּרְאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו׃
מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה כְּבָר הוּא וַאֲשֶׁר לִהְיוֹת כְּבָר הָיָה וְהָאֱלֹהִים יְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־נִרְדָּף[38]׃

I know that everything God does will be forever. It is impossible to add to it and subtract from it. God has made it in order that they will fear him. Whatever was already is and what will be it already was. God wants to keep the cycle of time turning.[39]

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[34]Davidson (1990), 63.

[35]7:15; 8:11-12, 14; 9:11-12.

[36]For a detailed discussion about the Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament see K. Koch (1983), 57-87.

[37]Murphy (1992), 8.

[38]נִרְדָּף is the Niphal ptc. of רָדַף which means "pursue,chase,persecute".

[39]This translation is taken from a course notes provided by Dr Peter Hayman at New College, University of Edinburgh. He follows Ibn Ezra who comments: "נרדף is that which is about to be, for he calls it הוא (in v. 15a). הוא is between past and present and what God seeks from time is that

Qohelet sees that there is nothing new under the sun because he understands that God has set up a complete system to operate the world. He also emphasises the point that God has made the world into a closed system so that human beings will fear Him. Human beings will not be able to change the course of events. God is the only person who has full control of events. In 6:10, Qohelet re-emphasises the changeless cycle of the natural world and the proper attitude of human beings toward God. If we can call something by name, it implies that it has already existed. God has named human beings Adam which means "of the earth".[40] The one who is named is subordinated to the one who gives him a name, so human beings are under God's control. Human beings cannot contend with God because He is mightier than them. Human beings remain incapable of changing their fortune which is determined by God. Thus no one can tell what will happen to him in the future (6:12). Though the phrase "fearing God" is not used in 6:10, the idea is implied.

From 3:14, 5:6 and 6:10, we can see that the idea of fearing God is significant in relation to the attitude of human beings toward God. Qohelet seems to follow the wisdom tradition which relates the fear of the Lord to wisdom: "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". However, he does not use the typical wisdom phrase, "fear of the Lord/God".[41] Rather, he uses the verbal form "to fear God" eight times (3:14; 5:6; 7:18; 8:12 [X2], 13; 9:2; 12:13). According to Qohelet, the concept of fearing God is quite different from that of the wisdom tradition. Crenshaw states:

> For Qoheleth it signifies cold terror; the fear of the Lord means that one is in mortal danger when dealing with God, who interferes in human affairs only at the point of judgement. Such a sense of the word is evident in 3:14; 5:7 (6); and 8:13, perhaps elsewhere. Thus "only fear of the invisible God remains, and every feeling of relationship and of trust in his character known to the devout is missing."[42]

In Eccl. 8:12b-13, the consequences for those who fear God and the wicked who do not fear God are sharply contrasted: it will be well with those who fear God, but it will not be well for the wicked. This statement seems to contradict Qohelet's own observation that a sinner who does evil a hundred times still prolongs his life (8:12a).

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it should be נִרְדָּף-time chasing after time and not stopping". Rashbam seems to choose persecute as the meaning of רָדַף, so he paraphrases: "For the Holy One sought out the persecuted to give him the money for which his persecutor troubled himself". Ibn Ezra's interpretation is preferable to Rashbam's because it is more consistent with the previous sentences. Rashbam's attempt does not fit this context at all.

[40]Murphy (1992), 58.

[41]Murphy (1991), 31.

[42]Crenshaw (1974), 44.

It seems to affirm wisdom tradition. Crenshaw thinks this passage is a gloss.[43] Gordis understands 8:12b-13 to be a subordinate clause of 8:11-12a.[44] He regards 8:12b-13 as a quotation for he translates "though I know the answer that 'it will be well in the end with those who revere God...'".[45] Murphy tends to agree with Gordis by suggesting that Qohelet is aware of the orthodox claim concerning retribution.[46]

The idea of fearing God dominates 8:11-13 which specifically relates to divine retribution. In Eccl. 8:11-12a, Qohelet complains that divine retribution does not appear soon enough to stop people from committing evil deeds. They do not fear God because they did not see God's punishment at work. The wisdom tradition teaches that those who do not fear God will not live long, but Qohelet and his contemporaries observe the contrary. According to the wisdom tradition, people should fear God because of reward and punishment. Qohelet points out that this kind of teaching does not work. He emphasises its weakness again in Eccl. 8:14. Qohelet counsels his audience to fear God not because they will definitely get a reward from Him, but because they will never understand Him. It is a futile hope to expect a reward from God because they fear him. Qohelet acknowledges that God does give rewards, but it seems that God does not give His rewards according to human actions. As mentioned above, God gives a reward to whomever He pleases (2:26). It is not clear whether those who fear God and those with whom God is pleased are the same group of people or not. Qohelet seems reluctant to refer to the person in 2:26 as one who fears God. For Qohelet, fearing God is not enough. What really counts is whether God is pleased with the person. Eccl. 2:26 and 8: 12a seem to be loosely connected. Though the word חוֹטֵא in 2:26 may not carry an ethical sense, the ethical interpretation should not be disregarded entirely (see Job 27:17).[47] Probably, the longer the sinner lives (8:12a) the more he will accumulate wealth for the man with whom God is pleased.

Some of Qohelet's contemporaries may have confidence that God will be pleased with them because they have kept God's commandments. They think God will bless them and cause them to prosper. It seems that the nuance of "the one who fears God" in 8:12b is similar to the Deuteronomic tradition. The language of Eccl. 8:12b is very close to Deut. 5:29: "Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever".[48] In Deuteronomy the one who fears God is supposed to keep God's

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[43]Crenshaw (1987), 155.
[44]Gordis (1968), 293.
[45]Gordis (1968), 184.
[46]Murphy (1992), 85.
[47]Rashbam interprets the sinner in 2:26 as the wicked man.
[48]Cf. Deut. 6:2, 13, 24; 12:28.

command. The correlation between the fear of God and observance of the Law can also be found in Ps. 19:10; 112:1; 119:63 and Sir 1:11-30. However, this correlation occurs only once in Ecclesiastes (12:13), by the hand of the epilogist. Qohelet never mentions "commandments" (מצות) and would not be likely to join them with fear of God in this facile manner.[49] We should take into account that the belief that the person who fears God will be well in Eccl. 8:12b belongs to the wisdom tradition; it is not Qohelet's belief. The phrase גַּם־יוֹדֵעַ אֲנִי indicates that Qohelet "knows about" (is aware of) this belief. However, he does not agree with this belief because he sees that the wicked are able to prolong their lives, despite the fact that they have committed many crimes.

Another nuance of "the person who fears God" in Ecclesiastes can be found in 7:18:

> טוֹב אֲשֶׁר תֶּאֱחֹז בָּזֶה וְגַם־מִזֶּה אַל־תַּנַּח אֶת־יָדֶךָ כִּי־יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים יֵצֵא אֶת־כֻּלָּם׃
> It is good that you take hold on to this, and also that you do not let go of that, for the person who fears God will escape from all of them.

Qohelet makes this conclusion after his two admonitions in 7:16-17. He has pointed out the limitation of both virtue and vice.[50] It is unwise to trust in one's own righteousness. It is equally unwise to misjudge the interfering power of God. According to Qohelet the person who fears God will not think that he is secure because of his righteousness and will not ignore the threat of punishment either. "To fear God" in Qohelet's term means "to live a moderate life". Qohelet seems to advocate a moderate life-style because his experience suggests that both virtue and vice do not bring satisfactory results. For Qohelet the idea of fearing God seems to flow from the mystery and incomprehensibility of God.[51] Thus to fear God seem to imply that a person is willing to accept whatever God gives him. This idea is similar to the concept of "middle way" among Thai Buddhists who try not to live an extreme life-style. They normally accept that whatever happens to them is the result of their actions in their previous lives which they cannot change. They continue to live for the future and hope that their good deeds will bring satisfactory results.

The idea of the incomprehensibility of God is not peculiar to Qohelet. The failure to comprehend the Lord is implied by Israel's celebration of the events of the saving history as "marvels" (פלא; נפלאות)[52] and as "works" (Cf. Ps. 92:6; 118:17).[53]

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[49]Murphy (1992), lxv.
[50]Murphy (1992), 70.
[51]Murphy (1992), lxvi.
[52]Ps. 9:2; 26:7; 72:18; 96:3; 118:23.
[53]Murphy (1992), lxvii.

The Psalmists consider the marvellous deeds of God as their security in the sense that God can miraculously rescue them from their powerful enemies. Though they do not understand how God can deliver them, they trust that God will be on their side. Therefore the Israelites always pray to God for deliverance and worship Him when they are delivered. However, Qohelet does not allow the mystery of God to become a reason or source of consolation and security.[54] Davidson comments:

> We can hardly imagine him joining the joyful throng flocking to the temple to shout 'Hallelujah'. He would probably have died with embarrassment. For Koheleth the experiential side of religion as mediated in worship seems to have died. He is left with a God in whom he believes, a God whom he must respect ('fear the Lord'), but a God who evokes neither devotion nor enthusiasm, and who is no longer impinging in any direct sense upon Koheleth's life. Religion as exemplified in the Psalms has been replaced by religious etiquette.[55]

It is true that Qohelet hardly mentions anything about worship and he does not advocate worship. But to say that Qohelet would not participate in worship seems to me to be fanciful. We have no evidence of what he thought about worship. The setting of Ecclesiastes is more in the secular sphere rather than in the religious sphere. For Qohelet God is not limited to the temple. The nuance of "to fear God" is broader than "to worship God". Probably, Qohelet does not call God יהוה, because this name is confined to Israelite religion. In Ecclesiastes God is concerned and in control of the whole world. He is not merely a national God.

The positive expressions of fearing God according to Qohelet are "to eat, drink and enjoy life" because they come from God's hand (2:24). The idea of enjoying life and the idea of fearing God are closely connected. For example:

> יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אֵין טוֹב בָּם כִּי אִם־לִשְׂמֹחַ וְלַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב בְּחַיָּיו׃
> וְגַם כָּל־הָאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל וְשָׁתָה וְרָאָה טוֹב בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא׃
> יָדַעְתִּי כִּי כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם עָלָיו אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּמִמֶּנּוּ
> אֵין לִגְרֹעַ וְהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה שֶׁיִּרְאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו׃
>
> I know that there is nothing better than to be happy and to enjoy oneself in one's life. And also every man may eat and drink and see good things in all his labour-this is a gift of God. I know that everything God does will be forever. It is impossible to add to it and it is impossible to subtract from it. God has made it in order that they will fear him. (Eccl. 3:12-14).

Qohelet advises that we should enjoy life because we are not able to change what God has planned. The purpose of God's creation is that human beings will fear Him. It seems that the appropriate response that human beings can show God is to revere Him

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[54]Murphy (1992), lxvii.
[55]Davidson (1990), 63.

by appreciating His gift. Qohelet is not alone in expressing his thankfulness by eating, drinking and rejoicing.

Eating is also part of Israelite worship. In Deuteronomy 12:1-7, Moses commands the Israelites to destroy all the places where the Cananites worship their gods. They should seek another place to worship God. They should bring their offerings there and eat before God. Also when the Israelites accepted the covenant at Mount Sinai, Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel to see God. They stayed before God and they ate and drank before God (Exodus 24:11). In the Feast of Tabernacles the whole community should come and rejoice before God for seven days (Deut. 16:13-15). Moses warns the Israelites that if they do not obey the Lord other nations will come and eat up their fruit and they will not be able to drink wine because the worm will eat their grapes (Deut. 28:33, 39). In his last word Joshua advises the Israelites to fear God because He provided fruit of vineyards and olive groves for them to eat (Josh. 24:13-14). Thus we can see that eating, drinking and rejoicing are basic elements in Israelite worship and are also signs of God's approval of them. Qohelet seems to regard eating, drinking and rejoicing as expressions of human gratitude toward God. Though Qohelet does not suggest that his audience worship God, his advice of eating, drinking and rejoicing seems to imply the idea of worshipping.

Another reason that human beings should fear God is that God is a judge. The epilogist concludes the book by warning that God will bring every deed into judgement (12:14). The style of this verse, together with verse 13, suggests that the epilogist shares the view of Sirach who combines the fear of God and obedience to the commandments (Sir.2:16; 43:27). However, Qohelet himself reminds the youth, after recommending joy, that God will bring judgement upon human beings (11:9). This reminder seems to be used to bring youth into a balanced life-style. Qohelet cautions that the young may misunderstand his message and live an extreme life-style.[56] Normally, God's judgement is not emphasised by Qohelet. Though he accepts that God will judge both the righteous and wicked (3:17), from his experience, he finds that in place of judgement there is wickedness (3:16). The nuance of מִשְׁפָּט in 3:16 includes "justice". We normally expect that in the time of judgement, justice will be given. But Qohelet points out that this may not be the case. He does not know how God's judgement is operating or how it will operate. God's judgement remains a mystery for him. The relationship between actions and consequences is not compatible with the

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[56]Gordis [(1968), 336] suggests that the word וְדַע is not adversative, but consecutive. Crenshaw [(1987), 184] however, thinks that the second half of 11:9 may be a moralistic gloss.

reality of events. Qohelet seems to see judgement in the context of time. In 3:17, Qohelet thinks that there is a time for every activity and deed. In 8:5-6, the word מִשְׁפָּט (judgement)[57] is in juxtaposition with the word עֵת (time). Qohelet seems to consider that a particular event that happens in a certain time is under divine judgement. The actual time is not revealed to human beings for Qohelet says, "nobody knows what will happen" (8:7). God's judgement for Qohelet seems to be the counterbalance of human freedom.[58]

From the evidence above it is obvious that Qohelet does not provide much detail about God. He never denies the existence of God. For him, God is the creator and the originator of everything in the world. Though God seems to be distant from human beings, He is still in control. Qohelet recognises that God has established a specific system to operate this world,[59] but it is impossible for any human being to discover this system. Qohelet notices that some people are favoured by God. But he does not know the reason. Since God is inscrutable, Qohelet suggests that we should fear Him. We should not rely on the traditional belief that if we do good deeds we will always receive satisfactory results. Nobody can predict the future (9:12). Human beings do not know for sure what will happen to them in the future. Therefore Qohelet advises that they should divide their portion seven or even eight ways (11:2). Undoubtedly, Qohelet believes that God is the giver and the provider for human beings. However, there is no guarantee that human beings will receive good things from God. Therefore whenever they have a chance, they should eat and drink and enjoy life before they lose the opportunity.[60] Rejoicing seems to be an appropriate response toward God's mercy. This positive expression shows that human beings can worship God in their daily living. Worship is not limited to the temple. In short, Qohelet tries to show us that human beings can relate to God in different ways.

The Idea of Enjoying Life

We have seen previously that inasmuch as one cannot count on a reward for virtue or punishment for vice, it is good for a man to enjoy himself, for even the ability to do this is a gift of God. Crenshaw considers this as man's lot: "walking under a mysterious closed universe, never certain before any possibility, step by step dependent upon God's free gift, ever ready to bear the riddle and stress of life".[61] If we read the

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[57]In this context it may be better to translate מִשְׁפָּט by "procedure".
[58]Ellul (1990), 265.
[59]God makes everything beautiful.
[60]Qohelet sees that there are more bad days than good days (11:8).
[61]Crenshaw (1974), 42-43.

whole book of Ecclesiastes, we notice that one of the concerns that Qohelet often addresses is the well-being of humanity. Qohelet often asks: "What is good?".[62] Qohelet himself puts a great deal of effort into finding out what might be good for human beings to do under the sun (2:3-10). Gese points out that Qohelet recognises no relationship between act, situation, and reputation, having rejected any connection between a person and that individual's acts or state.[63] Crenshaw agrees with Gese, commenting that, for Qohelet, there is no individual retribution, and man cannot know what the appropriate deed is for any moment or situation.[64] Human labour and profit do not directly relate to one another.[65] Several times Qohelet asks, "What advantage is there for a man who labours? (1:3; 3:9; 5:15)".

Since Qohelet does not find any direct relationship between hard labour and real profit, he suggests another alternative for human beings. He advises:

> אֵין־טוֹב בָּאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל וְשָׁתָה וְהֶרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בַּעֲמָלוֹ גַּם־זֶה רָאִיתִי אָנִי
> כִּי מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא׃
> There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and enjoy life by means of his wealth. This also I saw that it is from God's hand (Eccl. 2:24).

Qohelet gives this similar advice at least five more times (3:12-13, 22; 5:17-18; 8:15; 9:7-9). He seems to use this advice to conclude each important issue before starting a new topic. The basic formula "there is nothing better" (אֵין טוֹב) is frequently used in these passages. However the advice in 9:7-9 is peculiar for the formula "there is nothing better" is omitted and the imperative is used instead. Morever, this passage gives more specific details: eat bread, drink wine, wear a white garment, put oil on the head and enjoy life with a woman. The advice in 9:7-9 is similar to the advice given to Gilgamesh:

> Gilgamesh, whither rovest thou?
> The life thou pursuest thou shalt not find.
> When the gods created mankind,
> Death for mankind they set aside,
> Life in their own hands retaining.
> Thou Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly.
> Make thou merry by day and by night.
> Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing.
> Day and night dance thou and play!
> Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,
> Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.
> Pay heed to the little one that holds on to thy hand,
> Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom!

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[62]Cf. Zimmerli (1964), 153.
[63]Gese (1983), 143.
[64]Crenshaw (1974), 37.
[65]Gese (1983), 143.

For this is the task of [mankind]![66]

Eccl. 9:7 is also parallel to the eschatological banquet in the Qumran Community (1QSa 2:17-19). The foods mentioned here are only bread and wine:

[ואם לשולח]ן יחד יועד[ו לשים לחם ות]רוש, וערוך השולחן היחד [לאכול וה] תירוש
לשת[ת, אל ישלח] איש את ידו ברשת הלחם ו[התירוש] לפני הכוהן.
[When they] mee[t at the] communal [tab]le, [to set out bread and wi]ne, and the communal table is arranged [to eat and] to dri[nk] wine, [no] one [shall extend] his hand to the first (portion) of the bread and [the wine] before the priest.[67]

Schiffman explains why only bread and wine are mentioned:

> While these probably did not constitute the entire menu, they are singled out since only these two benedictions must be recited at the eschatological meal. The benediction over bread covered the other foods as well, except for the wine brought to the table during the meal which required its own benediction. Whereas the communal meal of the sect as described in 1QS 6:2-5 requires *either* bread or wine, the messianic banquet would involve both. The priest would recite the benediction first and receive the first portion of the bread and wine. All others present would recite the benediction in the order of their rank after the priestly messiah. The meals required a quorum of ten men.[68]

Notably, wine and meat are forbidden in the banquet of the Therapeutae, the sect that represents an Egyptian off-shoot of the Palestinian ascetic movement of the Essenes.[69] The Therapeutae use clearest and purest water; cold for the many, but warm for such of the more aged as are of a delicate constitution.[70] And the table is free from animal food, which would pollute it; and bread, with salt as a relish and sometimes hyssop as an added seasoning for sweeting, is placed on the table for the sake of the luxurious among them.[71] They regard wine as a drug of folly, and expensive viands arouse lust, the most insatiable of brute beasts.[72] The Qumran Community, in spite of having rigid rules, uses wine and bread to celebrate special occasions, especially in their religious ceremonies. Both wine and bread seem to be used as a symbol for celebration. The Qumran and the Therapeutae communities have differing views on wine. Whether or not any other foods are included in the menu is not important for the Qumran Community, but wine and bread must be there as the eschatological meal. These materials of the Qumran and the Therapeutae show us that eating and drinking are

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[66]*ANET*, 90.
[67]Schiffman (1989), 53-55.
[68]Schiffman (1989), 56.
[69]Vermes and Goodman (1989), 17.
[70]Vermes and Goodman (1989), 93.
[71]Vermes and Goodman (1989), 93.
[72]Vermes and Goodman (1989), 93.

positively accepted as parts of religious celebration. However, they seem to give much attention to the elements of food and the way each member should partake.

Significantly, Qohelet does not put his emphasis on the elements of food and drink. His main concern is the ability to enjoy life. The ability to eat food is far more important than having a variety of good food without the ability to eat. In 5:11, Qohelet observes: "Sweet is the sleep of the slave, whether he eats little or much, but abundance of the rich person does not permit him to sleep". For Qohelet the ability to enjoy life seems to indicate God's approval of the person (5:18; 9:7). Rashbam regards joy, or happiness, as God's greatest gift to man; it is the opposite of hedonistic pursuits.[73] Qohelet regards the inability to enjoy one's own wealth as a grievous evil. Qohelet gives an example in 6:1-2:

יֵשׁ רָעָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְרַבָּה הִיא עַל־הָאָדָם׃
אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתֶּן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁר וּנְכָסִים וְכָבוֹד וְאֵינֶנּוּ חָסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ ו מִכֹּל
אֲשֶׁר־יִתְאַוֶּה וְלֹא־יַשְׁלִיטֶנּוּ הָאֱלֹהִים לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִישׁ נָכְרִי יֹאכְלֶנּוּ זֶה הֶבֶל וְחֳלִי רָע
הוּא׃

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is tough upon human beings: A man to whom God gives wealth and possessions and abundance,[74] so he is deprived nothing which his heart desires, but God does not give him power to consume it, for a stranger consumes it (instead). This is futile and grievous evil (Eccl. 6:1-2).

Salters notes that the word אכל in this context must be taken in the sense of "to enjoy", citing Prov. 30:20 and Job 21:25 as examples.[75] No matter how rich a person is, his wealth is useless if God does not give him the ability to enjoy his wealth. Some people may be more fortunate than others in terms of the ability to gain wealth. But the amount of possessions is not a measure of final success. Here Qohelet is concerned to show that one of the greatest evils he has observed is the fact that some people are not given the ability to enjoy what wealth and substance they have.[76] Worse than this is that some strangers, who presumably have the capacity to enjoy such things, may step in and consume them. Qohelet does not explain why these rich people are not able to enjoy their wealth. He just points to God's sovereignty. However, the Targum interprets the witholding of this power to enjoy as being due to the sins of a man–על חובתיה.[77] Qohelet is not concerned with the wealth itself but the capacity to enjoy it.

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[73]Japhet and Salters (1985), 65.
[74]Salters [(1979), 284] suggests that in this context the more appropriate rendering of כבוד is abundance. Cf. Is. 61:6.
[75]Salters (1979), 284.
[76]Salters (1979), 282.
[77]Salters (1979), 285.

Sadly, having wealth alone does not bring about happiness. Both wealth and the ability to enjoy it are a gift of God. God may withold the capability of enjoying life, though he has already given wealth to some people. Human beings will experience real enjoyment only when God enables them to do so (5:18).

Since Qohelet put so much emphasis on enjoyment we will investigate more thoroughly the Hebrew words and phrases that he uses to express the idea of enjoying life. Moreover, we need to consider the way Qohelet presents his thought on this matter. The Rabbis find Qohelet self-contradictory in this matter, for they say:

> Rab Judah, son of R. Samuel b. Shilath said in Rab's name: The sages wished to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes because its words are self-contradictory...And how are its words self-contradictory? It is written: "anger is better than play (שחוק)" (7:3) but it is written: "I said of laughter (שחוק) it is to be praised" (2:2). It is written "Then I commended joy (שמחה)" (8:15) but it is written: "and of joy (שמחה) (I said) What doeth it" (2:2).[78]

Rashbam resolves this contradiction by explaining the ways certain words are used in Ecclesiastes. He regards the root שחוק as being always negative whereas the root שמח is either negative or positive.[79] The word שְׂחוֹק occurs four times in Ecclesiastes (2:2; 7:3, 6; 10:19). On one occasion, it is parallel with the word שִׂמְחָה (2:2) and on another occasion, it is parallel with שָׂמַח (10:19). Rashbam interprets שְׂחוֹק as "frivolity" rather than "laughter".[80] Moreover, Rashbam translates מְהוֹלָל in 2:2 as "mad" or "crazy" rather than "praiseworthy".[81] Therefore he does not feel that Qohelet contradicts himself. He also points out that לשחוק (which is masculine) is related to בטוב וראה, which is also masculine; ולשמחה is related to אנסכה בשמחה.[82] Rashbam's interpretation of שְׂחוֹק seems appropriate in the context of 2:2; 7:3, 6. It does not, however, fit in the context of 10:19. In this context שְׂחוֹק seems to be the result of the consumption of the food; food produces שְׂחוֹק. 10:19 seems to offer a contrast with the result of laziness in 10:18. Thus it has a positive meaning rather than a negative one.[83] Fox points out that Qohelet does not condemn שְׂחוֹק, whether as "laughter" or as "merriment", in and of itself.[84] Obviously, the word שְׂחוֹק carries negative connotations when it is used in relationship with the fool (7:3, 6). But on its own, it does not always denote trivial or contemptible amusement, although specific instances may refer to that sort of activity.[85] In 3:4, the infinitive לִשְׂחוֹק is in opposition to the infinitive

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[78]*b Shabbath*, 30b.
[79]Japhet and Salters (1985), 64.
[80]Japhet and Salters (1985), 64.
[81]Japhet and Salters (1985), 102.
[82]Japhet and Salters (1985), 102. Rashbam derives אנסכה from נסך instead of נסה.
[83]Cf. Ps. 126:2; Job 8:21.
[84]Fox (1989), 66.
[85]Fox (1989), 66.

לִבְכּוֹת (to cry). It seems to be one side of human emotion which each individual experiences.

The root שׂמח occurs 17 times in Ecclesiastes. Fox states that Qohelet uses this root in one of the many senses available in BH, where the word is applied to the entire range of pleasant experiences, from deep joy to trivial diversions.[86] Qohelet frequently uses this root in a positive way. He seems to uphold enjoyment for he says:

> וְשִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־הַשִּׂמְחָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין־טוֹב לָאָדָם תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי אִם־לֶאֱכֹל
> וְלִשְׂתוֹת וְלִשְׂמֹחַ וְהוּא יִלְוֶנּוּ בַעֲמָלוֹ יְמֵי חַיָּיו אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃
> I commend enjoyment because there is nothing better for a man under the sun except to eat and drink and enjoy oneself, and it will accompany him in his toil throughout his life which God gives him under the sun (Eccl. 8:15).

Qohelet recommends enjoyment after he sees that the righteous people receive what seems more fitting to the wicked, while the wicked are in a better situation (8:14). The idea that enjoyment will accompany a person throughout his life is significant. Qohelet seems to suggest that we can hold on to enjoyment. Rashbam relates the word יִלְוֶנּוּ in Eccl. 8:15 to Gen. 29:34 where it narrates Leah's thought when she gave birth to her third child.[87] She thought that Jacob would become *attached* to her because she had borne him three sons. The nuance of the word לָוָה seems to imply a long-lasting relationship. Thus the nuance of the root שׂמח includes "happiness", or the like, because it does not depend on circumstances. Therefore I do not agree with Fox who states: "*Śimḥah* in Qohelet never means 'happiness' (or 'joy')".[88] Though Fox's category of three English terms–"pleasure", "happiness" and "joy"–is valuable,[89] his interpretation of the root שׂמח in Ecclesiastes is mistaken. Fox gives five reasons to support his argument.[90] Obviously, his view is based on the assumption that in Ecclesiastes this root can have only one meaning, namely "pleasure", even though Fox himself admits that it is applied to the entire range of pleasant experiences.[91] For example, in his fifth point he states:

> It is pointless to *advise* happiness, because people cannot impose happiness upon themselves. They can choose to indulge in pleasures and to be aware of and sensitive to an experience, but they cannot directly induce happiness at will. On the other hand, the advice to undertake pleasurable activities and to enjoy them *can* be carried out; one can steep himself in pleasure even when his heart is heavy.[92]

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[86]Fox (1989), 63.
[87]Japhet and Salters (1985), 174-175.
[88]Fox (1989), 64.
[89]For detail, see Fox (1989), 62.
[90]Fox (1989), 64.
[91]Fox (1989), 63.
[92]Fox (1989), 64.

Qohelet does not think that people can bring happiness upon themselves. He regards happiness as a gift of God. In 2:26, Qohelet states that God gives wisdom and knowledge and happiness (וְשִׂמְחָה) to those whom God pleases. In 5:17-18, Qohelet advises those who have wealth to enjoy their wealth, for God gives to them the ability to be happy (לִשְׂמֹחַ) with their wealth. In 6:1-2, Qohelet clearly points out that nobody can induce happiness at will no matter how wealthy he is. Qohelet needs to urge people to be happy because, though happiness is available, some people disregard its existence. They look for something else which is beyond their ability. Instead of receiving their own portion, they seek out profit.

Instead of making the same mistake as Fox (who holds to the idea that Qohelet gives only one meaning to the root שׂמח), we should recognise that the nuance of this root is quite broad. In 2:1, it seems that שׂמח is a means for testing and refers to pleasure in general.[93] In 2:2, however, Qohelet questions שִׂמְחָה, "What will this accomplish?". In this context the word שִׂמְחָה seems to mean "pleasure" in the sense of that which is momentary, fleeting and transitory. In 4:16, Qohelet refers to the poor youth with whom, despite his wisdom, the later generation is not happy (שׂמח); they do not appreciate him. In Judg. 9:19, subjects who are happy with their leader are said to "take pleasure in" or "have joy from" (שִׂמְחוּ ב־) him. Likewise the ruler is pleased with his subjects. It is clear from the context of Eccl. 4:16 and Judg. 9:19 that the root שׂמח is used to describe the mutual relationship between ruler and subjects. If they are able to get along well with each other they are happy. If the subjects are not happy with their ruler they will start a rebellious campaign.[94] Therefore the nuance of שׂמח in Eccl. 4:16 seems to refer to a peaceful political relationship between ruler and subjects. Gianto points out that the phrase בְּשִׂמְחַת לִבּוֹ in 5:19 refers to inner joy inspired by God.[95] In Eccl. 7:4, Qohelet uses this root with בית to refer to the place (the house of mirth) where temporary pleasure is sought. Qohelet regards those who go there as foolish. The phrase בְּבֵית שִׂמְחָה in Eccl. 7:4 is parallel with בֵּית מִשְׁתֶּה (house of drinking) in 7:2. The Qumran fragment of Eccl. 7:2 has שמחה in place of מִשְׁתֶּה.[96] They seem to be synonyms. Thus we may translate these two phrases as house of feasting. Both of them are used in opposition to the phrase בֵּית־אֵבֶל (house of mourning). In this context the house of feasting may refer to the specific place where people can go to seek pleasure or for a joyful occasion such as birth or marriage.

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[93]Gianto (1992), 530.
[94]Cf. Judg. 9:22-45.
[95]Gianto (1992), 530.
[96]Ulrich (1992), 145-146.

Those who are constantly seeking pleasure are not aware of the facts of life–everyone will die. The nuance of שׂמח in this context is temporary pleasure.

From the evidence above, it seems clear that שׂמח means joy or happiness in the context that God provides for human beings (5:18; 8:15). Gianto sees שׂמח as a technical term used by Qohelet to respond to the problem of human beings presented with הבל.[97] However it may mean mere pleasure when it is used to indicate the foolishness of human beings who seek pleasure without realising what life is really like.

Another word that Qohelet uses to represent the idea of enjoying life is שָׂבַע (be satisfied). In Eccl. 6:3, Qohelet observes that the aborted child is better off than the person who does not derive satisfaction from his property:

> אִם־יוֹלִיד אִישׁ מֵאָה וְשָׁנִים׀ רַבּוֹת יִחְיֶה וְרַב ׀ שְׁיִהְיוּ יְמֵי־שָׁנָיו וְנַפְשׁוֹ לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע
> מִן־הַטּוֹבָה וְגַם־קְבוּרָה לֹא־הָיְתָה לוֹ אָמַרְתִּי טּוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ הַנֶּפֶל׃
> If a man beget a hundred and lives many years - and if the days of his years are many - but if he is not satisfied with good things, and also he has no burial. I say the aborted child is better off than he (Eccl. 6:3).

Many people desire to live a long life, but Qohelet sees that long life is pointless if they do not derive satisfaction from their wealth during their life-time. Even worse Qohelet sees that it is better for them not to be born at all. They are born in vain.[98] For they are worse off than the person who will never see life. Such a radical judgement is testimony to Qohelet's belief that satisfaction is integral to the meaning of life. Qohelet continues to compare the aborted child with the person who does not derive satisfaction from his wealth in 6:5. He thinks the aborted child has more rest (נַחַת). It seems that Qohelet links the idea of satisfaction with the idea of peacefulness. In 4:6, Qohelet says, "It is better to have one hand full in peace (נַחַת) than two hands full in toil and chasing after the wind". This judgement shows that Qohelet considers the quality of satisfaction which derives from wealth is more important than the quantity of wealth which the person possesses. Therefore the nuance of שׂבע includes the idea of peacefulness. The person who is satisfied does not want any more. He is at peace like the aborted child who does not need to strive for living.

The person who is at peace in life knows that money or wealth is only a means to an end. It should not be an end in itself. If one aims at wealth he will never be

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[97]Gianto (1992), 529.

[98]There is a similar expression in the Thai language (*sia chat kert*), which translates directly as "born in vain". Thai people understand this to mean that those who can afford to make luxury purchases should do so. If they do not, a Thai will say, "You are born in vain, you should not have been born this way".

satisfied with it. In 5:9, Qohelet says, "He who loves money will not be satisfied (שׂבע) with money, nor the one who loves wealth, with revenue". Those who labour to earn more money will never cease to want more. In 6:7, Qohelet points out that those who work so hard for what they desire will not be fulfilled. Instead of working for more wealth they should get satisfaction from their wealth. Qohelet also points out that a surfeit of property (הַשָּׂבָע) causes the rich to have insomnia (5:11). The rich are concerned with their wealth and always have worries about it. Instead of bringing more satisfaction, the surfeit of property creates more anxiety. Real satisfaction, according to Qohelet, derives from the appropriate proportion between consumption and resources. Food, no matter how basic or how plentiful it is, can bring real satisfaction.

Several Old Testament passages relate שׂבע with אָכַל (to eat). For example Hos. 4:10:

> וְאָכְלוּ וְלֹא יִשְׂבָּעוּ הִזְנוּ וְלֹא יִפְרָצוּ כִּי־אֶת־יְהוָה עָזְבוּ לִשְׁמֹר:[99]
> They will eat but they will not be satisfied; they will commit fornication but they will not increase, because they have forsaken the Lord.

Also Is. 9:19:

> וַיִּגְזֹר עַל־יָמִין וְרָעֵב וַיֹּאכַל עַל־שְׂמֹאול וְלֹא שָׂבֵעוּ אִישׁ בְּשַׂר־זְרֹעוֹ יֹאכֵלוּ:
> On the right they will cut off (piece of meat to eat) but they will be hungry; on the left they will eat but they will not be satisfied. Each man will eat the flesh of his own offspring.

From these two passages the expectation that eating would bring about satisfaction is clear. The reason that they are not satisfied is because they do not have enough to eat. God has punished them for their sins. God is the real provider of their food. Moses reminded the Israelites before they entered the promised land that God would give them good land: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land which he has given you [וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לָךְ:]" (Deut.8:10). From this passage we also see that eating can bring about satisfaction. Qohelet also recognises that food to eat is a gift from God. Therefore Qohelet frequently advises that he sees there is nothing better than to eat and to drink and to enjoy life. For Qohelet, the function of food is not only to meet a physical need but also to provide satisfaction. This idea is clear, for Qohelet connects eating and drinking with enjoyment.

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[99]The meaning of this word in the context is not clear and it should belong to the following verse.

The Hebrew phrase that Qohelet uses for describing enjoyment is רְאֵה טוֹב (3:13; cf. 2:24; 5:17). This meaning is supported by 8:15 where the word לְשִׂמְחָה is used in juxtaposition with אֵכוֹל (to eat) and לִשְׁתּוֹת (to drink). In 3:12 a similar phrase עֲשׂוֹת טוֹב is used only once and also in juxtaposition with לִשְׂמוֹחַ. Another similar phrase is רְאֵה חַיִּים in 9:9, where the context suggests means "enjoy life". In 6:6, the word רְאֵה is used with טוֹבָה to refer to the idea of enjoying life. In 7:14, the word טוֹבָה on its own means "be happy". In 6:9, the word מַרְאֵה is used with עֵינַיִם. The meaning of this phrase in this context is not clear:

> טוֹב מַרְאֵה עֵינַיִם מֵהֲלַךְ־נָפֶשׁ גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וּרְעוּת רוּחַ׃
> Better is the sight of the eyes (the enjoyment of life) than the wandering of desire (the departing of life). This also is futile and chasing after wind.

Gordis' interpretation of this verse is as follows: "The actual enjoyment of life is better than longing for pleasure".[100] Clearly Gordis understands that the phrase מַרְאֵה עֵינַיִם refers to enjoyment[101] while the phrase מֵהֲלַךְ־נָפֶשׁ is taken to refer to desire.[102] Thus the phrase מֵהֲלַךְ־נָפֶשׁ can be translated as "the wandering of desire". However, in the light of the way the word הָלַךְ is being used in Ecclesiastes and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, Whybray suggests that the phrase מֵהֲלַךְ־נָפֶשׁ in this context may well be a circumlocation for dying.[103] From the context alone both interpretations are possible. But from the way the word הָלַךְ is normally used, Whybray's suggestion is preferable. From this evidence, it seems that enjoyment is a positive response toward death. This idea is affirmed by 11:9 where the phrase וּבְמַרְאֵי עֵינֶיךָ is used. In 11:9, Qohelet advises youths to enjoy their life in their prime before they lose the opportunity.

In short, the way Qohelet uses the phrase רְאֵה טוֹב to refer to enjoyment seems to be a proper response to his own search for an understanding of the meaning of life in 2:3 where the word רְאֵה and טוֹב are also used in a different sense. He wants to find out what is good for human beings to do under the sun. Seeing that in 2:1 and 8:15, the word שׂמח receives special attention, Gianto regards these verses as introducing two different stages in the development of the theme of enjoyment, namely, 2:1-8:14 and 8:15-11:9.[104] In 2:1, Qohelet uses שׂמח as a means of testing the meaning of life. In 8:15, he praises שׂמח as the best solution for facing the futility of life.

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[100]Gordis (1968), 261.
[101]Cf. Whitley [(1979), 59] who translates this phrase as "attaining pleasure".
[102]Cf. Murphy (1992), 48-49.
[103]Whybray (1989), 109. Cf. Whitley [(1979), 60] who renders the whole line, "better the pleasure of the moment than the departing of life".
[104]Gianto (1992), 529.

Throughout his search Qohelet finds that there is nothing better than to enjoy life since it is futile and unpredictable. However, enjoyment does not come as one wishes. It is a gift from God who enables human beings to enjoy life. Lohfink is probably right in seeing that for Qohelet "the supreme good"[105] is "to eat and drink and have pleasure with all the wealth" (5:17).[106] Wealth does not always provide happiness. Real satisfaction may derive from simply having a meal. Long life is useless if one has not experienced real enjoyment once. Admitting that enjoyment is transitory, he still recommends it because he sees that enjoyment is something that human beings can grasp in the present to fulfil their inner need. Considering the phrase הָאֱלֹהִים מַעֲנֶה in 5:19 as "God answers or reveals", Lohfink sees the joy of the heart as divine revelation.[107] It seems that the joy of the heart is God's answer for those who search for the meaning of life. God's answer seems to include God's approval of human deeds for Qohelet sees that the joy of the heart is the sign that "God has already approved your deeds" (9:7). Gianto sensibly comments: "God's approval of human actions thus leaves no room for the idea that life is meaningless, just as the inner joy sweeps away all concerns".[108] Whether in the future human beings will receive a better reward, nobody knows. Therefore it is better to take the opportunity now. Qohelet sees that eating, drinking and enjoyment are what human beings get in return for their work. Enjoyment should be a goal of human beings in life. However, some people postpone their enjoyment to the future in the hope that they will receive a greater gift. Qohelet considers this hope a big mistake and he feels pity for the many rich people who lose the chance to enjoy their wealth.

The Idea of Death in Ecclesiastes

Reflecting on events that happen in the world, Qohelet is troubled by many things he sees. The arbitrariness of death troubles him more than anything else.[109] Thus the idea of death in Ecclesiastes is crucial for an understanding of Qohelet's view

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[105]Lohfink [(1990), 625] translates the phrase טוֹב אֲשֶׁר־יָפֶה as "the supreme good". Lohfink's translation is quite unusual but he is probably right. Though Crenshaw [(1987), 120 and 124] does not translates this phrase as Lohfink does, he seems to have a similar idea for he explains: "Having considered the example of the wealthy person who neither enjoyed his wealth nor retained it for his son's benefit, Qohelet advises on the best way to avoid such misery and resentment of that unfortunate individual". Indeed this phrase is difficult to translate. Schoors [(1992), 139] considers אשר as introducing an object clause and follows Whitley [(1979), 55] who renders: "Behold that which I have discovered is good, that it is becoming to eat and drink".

[106]Lohfink (1990), 625.

[107]Lohfink (1990), 634.

[108]Gianto (1992), 531.

[109]Crenshaw (1987), 25.

about life. Qohelet's recommendation to enjoy life seems to derive from the fact that everybody will die.

He uses at least three Hebrew terms to refer to the idea of death. The first one is the Hebrew root מות which occurs 15 times in Ecclesiastes.[110] This root can mean "to die", "dead", "death". Another Hebrew term that Qohelet uses to refer to the idea of death is the noun מִקְרֶה which occurs 7 times in this book (2:14-15; 3:19[X3], 9:2-3), and is used elsewhere in the entire Old Testament only 3 times (Ruth 2:3; 1 Sam. 6:9; 20:26). This noun is another special term for Qohelet. All occurrences outside Ecclesiastes mean "chance". In Ecclesiastes this noun means "fate" or "destiny" or "the end of life".

Qohelet also uses the verb הָלַךְ, which normally means "to go" or "to walk", to represent the idea of death. Many times Qohelet uses this verb to refer to the way people live (2:14; 4:15; 6:8; 10:3, 15; 11:9). Interestingly, he uses this same verb to refer to the final destination of human beings (1:4; 3:20; 5:14-15; 6:4, 6, 9; 9:10). Notably, when הָלַךְ carries this connotation, it is often in opposition to the verb בָּא. It is clear that the verb הָלַךְ is an Hebrew idiom, meaning "to die". In 3:20, Qohelet says, "All are going to the same place", and in 6:6, he asks "Do not all go to the same place?". The place seems to be Sheol which he mentions only once in 9:10.

In the Hebrew Bible, certain ideas of death are prominent: death is the consequence of human sins (especially in the Pentateuch and the prophets); death in old age is naturally accepted as the conclusion of life (Gen. 25:8; 35:29); premature death is miserable (2 Sam. 1:26; 2:33-34); death is punishment for the wicked (Prov. 11:4, 7, 19; 12:7). In contrast, Qohelet seems to regard death as a universal experience (3:2); the timing and the nature of death are not significant. There is no connection between cause and effect in a person's life.[111] At the point of death all are made equal; in death there is no difference between the wise and the fool, though they are different when they are alive. Qohelet clearly emphasises this fact:

הֶחָכָם֙ עֵינָ֣יו בְּרֹאשׁ֔וֹ וְהַכְּסִ֖יל בַּחֹ֣שֶׁךְ הוֹלֵ֑ךְ וְיָדַ֕עְתִּי גַּם־אֲנִ֕י שֶׁמִּקְרֶ֥ה אֶחָ֖ד יְקָרֶ֥ה אֶת־כֻּלָּֽם׃
וְאָמַ֙רְתִּי֙ אֲנִ֣י בְלִבִּ֔י כְּמִקְרֵ֥ה הַכְּסִ֖יל גַּם־אֵ֣נִי יִקְרֵ֑נִי וְלָמָ֤ה חָכַ֙מְתִּי֙ אֲנִ֣י אָ֔ז יוֹתֵ֖ר
וְדִבַּ֣רְתִּי בְלִבִּ֑י שֶׁגַּם־זֶ֖ה הָֽבֶל׃
כִּ֣י אֵ֤ין זִכְרוֹן֙ לְחָכָ֣ם עִם־הַכְּסִ֔יל לְעוֹלָ֖ם בְּשֶׁכְּבָ֣ר הַיָּמִ֑ים הַכֹּ֖ל נִשְׁכָּ֥ח
וְאֵ֛יךְ **יָמ֥וּת** הֶחָכָ֖ם עִם־הַכְּסִֽיל׃

The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. But I also know that the same fate will befall all of them. Then I said in my heart that the fate of the

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[110]Eccl. 2:16; 3:2, 19[X2]; 4:2[X2]; 7:1, 17, 26; 8:8; 9:3, 4, 5[X2]; 10:1.
[111]Gese (1983), 144.

> fool will befall me. Why then have I become especially wise? And I said in my heart this is also futile. Because there is no remembrance for the wise man along with the fool forever inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man will die along with the fool! (Eccl. 2:14-16).

This idea is opposite to the traditional wisdom, especially the Book of Proverbs which always shows that being wise will lead to a better outcome than being foolish (Prov. 10:1, 14; 13:20; 14:3; 15:20). Some may argue that though the wise have died, their fame remains. In Israel and in many cultures, there are burial markers to remember the persons who have died.[112] An unnamed prophet from Judah was buried near the altar at Bethel during the reign of King Jeroboam, and his burial marker was recognised three hundred years later (1 Kgs. 13:30; 2 Kgs 23:15-18). Absalom, who had no son, erected a monument for himself in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 18:18). God promises the eunuchs who are faithful to him that he will give monuments to them in the temple (Is. 56:4-5). From this evidence, we can see that the remembrance of the deceased is very important. However, Qohelet points out that the wise will be forgotten as well as the foolish. In 9:15, the poor wise man who rescued the town is forgotten.

Qohelet also observes that because of death, there is no difference between animals and human beings.

> כִּי֩ מִקְרֶ֨ה בְנֵי־הָאָדָ֜ם וּמִקְרֶ֤ה הַבְּהֵמָה֙ וּמִקְרֶ֣ה אֶחָ֔ד לָהֶ֑ם כְּמ֥וֹת זֶ֖ה כֵּ֣ן מ֣וֹת זֶ֔ה
> וְר֥וּחַ אֶחָ֖ד לַכֹּ֑ל וּמוֹתַ֤ר הָאָדָם֙ מִן־הַבְּהֵמָ֔ה אָ֖יִן כִּ֥י הַכֹּ֖ל הָֽבֶל׃
> הַכֹּ֖ל הוֹלֵ֣ךְ אֶל־מָק֑וֹם אֶחָ֤ד הַכֹּל֙ הָיָ֣ה מִן־הֶעָפָ֔ר וְהַכֹּ֖ל שָׁ֥ב אֶל־הֶעָפָֽר׃
> מִ֚י יוֹדֵ֣עַ ׀ ר֣וּחַ בְּנֵי־הָאָדָ֗ם הָעֹלָ֤ה הִיא֙ לְמָ֔עְלָה וְר֥וּחַ הַבְּהֵמָ֖ה הַיֹּרֶ֣דֶת הִ֑יא לְמַ֖טָּה לָאָֽרֶץ׃
> The fate of human beings is like the fate of animals. One fate belongs to them; as this one dies the other also dies. All have the same life-breath. Human beings have no advantage over animals, for everything is futile. All are going to the same place; all came from dust and all return to dust. Who knows if the spirit of human beings goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth? (Eccl. 3:19-21).

This idea is scarcely tolerable to Christians or Buddhists. Christians know that God created mankind to rule over animals. Buddhists try to accumulate their merits as much as possible to prevent them from returning as animals in the next life. Buddhists regard animals as lower than human beings. In this passage, Qohelet uses the word רוּחַ on two levels. In 3:19, he refers to the life-breath, indicating that both human beings and animals have the same kind of life-breath.[113] The Psalmist also uses the word רוּחַ to refer to life-breath as the source of life:

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[112]Bloch-Smith (1992), 113.

[113]In Gen. 1:30 and 2:7, the Hebrew phrase נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה is used instead.

תַּסְתִּיר פָּנֶיךָ יִבָּהֵלוּן תֹּסֵף רוּחָם יִגְוָעוּן וְאֶל־עֲפָרָם יְשׁוּבוּן׃
תְּשַׁלַּח רוּחֲךָ יִבָּרֵאוּן וְתְחַדֵּשׁ פְּנֵי אֲדָמָה׃
When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their life-breath, they perish and return to the dust. When you send your breath, they are created, and you renew the faces of the earth (Ps. 104:29-30).

Similarly, in Eccl. 12:7, Qohelet uses the same metaphor to refer to death. When the life-breath returns to God, human beings die. In 3:21, Qohelet uses רוּחַ to refer to the spirit, using the rhetorical question to challenge what may have been the contemporary belief of life after death. Qohelet does not debate the issue of whether animals have a spirit or not. We also do not know whether his contemporaries believed that animals have a spirit or not. We can only conjecture from Qohelet's language that Qohelet's contemporaries believed that human beings have an immortal spirit (going upward) and animals have just a life force (going downward). He may not explicitly deny such belief, but he does not agree with those who claim to know exactly what will happen after death. Qohelet prefers to view life as ending at death, arguing that both human beings and animals go to the same destination. Since they come from the dust, they will return to the dust.[114]

In addition, Qohelet attacks the wisdom tradition by indicating that the righteous will die like the wicked.

הַכֹּל כַּאֲשֶׁר לַכֹּל מִקְרֶה אֶחָד לַצַּדִּיק וְלָרָשָׁע לַטּוֹב וְלַטָּהוֹר וְלַטָּמֵא וְלַזֹּבֵחַ
וְלַאֲשֶׁר אֵינֶנּוּ זֹבֵחַ כַּטּוֹב כֵּחַטֵּא הַנִּשְׁבָּע כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁבוּעָה יָרֵא׃
All share the same fate-the righteous and the wicked, the good (and the bad), the clean and the unclean, those who are sacrificing and those who are not sacrificing. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take oaths (Eccl. 9:2).

Qohelet shows that the good deeds of the righteous cannot rescue them from death. In Psalms, the Psalmist always pleads for God to rescue them from death (or the hands of the wicked), claiming their righteousness (Ps. 5:1-5; 7:1-9; 17:1-13). In Proverbs, the sages teach that the righteous will live and the wicked will die (11:19); the wicked will be punished and the righteous will be delivered (11:21). Some passages in Proverbs even suggest that the righteous will not die (4:18; 12:28; 14:32; cf. 15:24). Many scholars tend to think that belief in eternal life was not established in the Old Testament. Such presuppositions appear in the translations of 12:28. Where the Masoretic Text reads וְדֶרֶךְ נְתִיבָה אֶל־מָוֶת, the *RSV* translates, "but the way of error leads to death", and the *NEB* translates, "but there is a well-worn path to death". Both versions seem to

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[114]Cf. Gen. 2:19 and 3:19. In 2:19 the Hebrew word אֲדָמָה is used but in 3:19, both אֲדָמָה and עָפָר are used synonymously.

follow the Septuagint. However, the *NIV*, following the Masoretes, translates "along that path (of righteousness) is immortality". The Masoretic Text probably preserves the correct reading of this passage because a similar idea occurs in 14:32 and 15:24. Qohelet does not agree with this belief. He destroys the hope of the righteous by pointing out that they too are mortal beings.

From these three comparisons, the wise and the fool (2:14), human beings and animals (3:19), the righteous and the wicked (9:2), Qohelet concludes that they are all on equal terms at the end though they are different at the beginning. These passages clearly indicate that human beings will eventually die no matter how they live. There is no correlation between virtue and the timing of one's death. Death can happen anytime; nobody knows their turn (9:3, 12). Gese points out that the word מִקְרֶה in Older Hebrew refers to events which happen with no reasonable relationship to actions on the part of human beings.[115] In 1 Sam. 6:9 the Philistine priests conclude that, if the ark of Yahweh does not return to the territory of the Israelites, they will know that a great disaster struck them by chance. Thus death, according to Qohelet, can happen to anybody by "chance". Only once does he warn the wicked that they will die before their time if they are overly wicked (7:17). He does not pay attention to how one dies, but he repeatedly emphasises the power of death that affects human life. There may be a few exceptions,[116] but Qohelet is more concerned with the majority of the cases. The fact that all human beings must die causes Qohelet to feel despair because death cancels every human achievement.[117] Ironically, in 9:10, Qohelet urges his audience to do their best while they are still alive, pointing out that there will be no work or calculation or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol. He thinks that there is nothing after death. Here he agrees with most passages in the Hebrew Bible that those who are in Sheol lead a vacuous existence, they are aware of nothing (cf. Job 14:21; Ps. 88:11-13; 115:17).[118] Schoors sees that death, according to Qohelet, seems to indicate complete extinction.[119]

For Qohelet, death is so powerful that nobody can escape from it (8:8). It can destroy the beauty of life, it can cause bitterness in life (7:26; 10:1). In 9:3, Qohelet seems to complain that it is not fair that all meet the same fate.[120] In 9:3b, he seems to imply that all human beings have to die because they all have sinned; their hearts are full

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[115]Gese (1983), 144.
[116]Enoch (Gen. 5:24), Elijah (2 Kgs. 2:11-12).
[117]Crenshaw (1987), 25.
[118]Schoors (1985), 302.
[119]Schoors (1985), 303.
[120]Qohelet's own language is "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is the same fate for all".

of evil. Although he realises that nobody escapes death, he thinks that the living are better than the dead. He states:

כִּי־מִי אֲשֶׁר יִבָּחֵר [יְחֻבַּר] אֶל כָּל־הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ בִּטָּחוֹן כִּי־לְכֶלֶב חַי הוּא טוֹב
מִן־הָאַרְיֵה הַמֵּת׃
כִּי הַחַיִּים יוֹדְעִים שֶׁיָּמֻתוּ וְהַמֵּתִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים מְאוּמָה וְאֵין־עוֹד לָהֶם שָׂכָר כִּי
נִשְׁכַּח זִכְרָם׃

Anyone who is attached to the living still has hope, for a live dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die but the dead know nothing; nor have they any reward, for their reputation is forgotten (Eccl. 9:4-5).

He sees that the living have hope because they still have an opportunity to enjoy life (9:4, 7). Qohelet also points out that the living know that they will die. The constant awareness of one's own death is essential to the living. Qohelet advises that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, for the living will be reminded that they will die (7:2, 4). Those who are not aware of the reality of death will keep on working and accumulating more wealth. They forget that they can take nothing with them when they die (5:14-15). Life is short; they should take what they already have and enjoy it (5:17). Qohelet supports the idea that to enjoy life is better than to die (6:9).[121] Qohelet seems to prefer life rather than death. He discusses death so much because he wants to remind people that they have a limited time to enjoy life.

Surprisingly, he sometimes suggests that death is better than life. For example:

וְשַׁבֵּחַ אֲנִי אֶת־הַמֵּתִים שֶׁכְּבָר מֵתוּ מִן־הַחַיִּים אֲשֶׁר הֵמָּה חַיִּים עֲדֶנָה׃

I declared that the dead who have already died are (better) than the living who are still alive (Eccl. 4:2).

Qohelet considers death is better than life after he sees that there is no hope for the oppressed (4:1). They find no comfort, so death seems to be the best solution to them. Death may be a blessing, since it releases one from further suffering.[122] Under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, the persecution of the righteous was of sustained and unusual severity, therefore the premature death of the righteous indicates that they were worthy of the divine presence (Wis. of Sol. 3:4-5); their death freed them from further suffering.[123] The author of the Wisdom of Solomon (first century B.C.E.) regards the death of the good man as rest (4:7). He also looks forward to judgement after death: "Then the just man shall take his stand, full of assurance, to confront those who oppressed him and made light of all his sufferings" (5:1-2). Instead of looking

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[121]For detailed discussion of this verse, see the section on the idea of enjoying life. Cf. Whitley [(1979), 60] who renders the whole line, "better the pleasure of the moment than the departing of life".
[122]Bailey (1979), 78.
[123]Bailey (1979), 78.

forward, Qohelet looks backward. He says, "But better than both is the one who is not yet born, who has not seen the evil deed done under the sun" (4:3). Suffering is unavoidable to those who are born into the world. Only the aborted child can bypass suffering (6:4). From the text itself we do not know whether Qohelet believes in life after death or not. He does not totally deny it, but he challenges those who hold to this view. However, he seems to assume that there is life before birth. Thus he suggests that though the aborted child may not have a chance to enjoy good things, he has more peace than those who live long but do not enjoy life (6:5). It is quite likely that Qohelet is speaking metaphorically here. However, he himself never chooses death or suggests suicide as a way out of suffering. The real consolation for the living is to have the ability to enjoy life.

Although many people may regard long life as a blessing, Qohelet points out that it cannot compensate for the agony of human beings who are vulnerable to the power of death. All will finally die no matter how long they live (6:6). Those who live long should enjoy life while they can (11:8) because at the closing chapter of one's life the opportunity for accomplishing the desire of one's heart is dramatically reduced.[124] It is not clear whether the poem in Eccl. 12:2-5 refers to aging or death.[125] Probably it refers to both but the imagery of death is significant. Fox remarks that "the poem's purpose is not to convey information; it is to create an attitute toward aging and (more important) death".[126] Qohelet reminds his young audience that death is imminent. Within six verses, Qohelet employs the temporal marker עַד אֲשֶׁר (before) three times (12:1-2, 6), linking back to one clause in 12:1a. This marker creates the idea of urgency. The way Qohelet reminds his young audience is very interesting. He says, "Remember your creator (בּוֹרְאֶיךָ)". The word בּוֹרְאֶיךָ is unusual because it is a plural rather than a singular. Therefore some scholars propose other readings.[127] However, I agree with many scholars who think that "creator" is still appropriate since other alternatives do not make any better sense.[128] Crenshaw chooses to render "your well" symbolising one's wife.[129] It is unlikely that Qohelet would urge young people to only reflect on the joys of female companionship before old age. There are many things they can do to enjoy life. Enjoying life with a woman is mentioned only once (9:9). Clearly Qohelet acknowledges God as the creator, frequently using the verb עָשָׂה with the

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[124]Davis (1991), 305.
[125]See Fox [(1989), 281-298] for a detailed discussion about various approaches to interpretation.
[126]Fox (1989), 298.
[127]Murphy [(1992), 113] summarises four different readings: your well/spring, referring to one's wife; your pit/grave, referring to death; vigor and health.
[128]Gordis (1968), 340; Whybray (1989), 163; Fox (1989), 300; Murphy (1992), 117.
[129]Crenshaw (1987), 184-185.

subject אֱלֹהִים to describe God's deed. Qohelet probably uses this new term here to emphasise the supreme authority of God who gives life and at the same time can take it away (12:7). The rendering "Remember your creator" makes better sense and creates greater impact. Notably, the word זְכֹר in 12:1 is the only imperative of the root זכר used in Ecclesiastes. Normally, זכר is used with the negative לֹא or אֵין (1:11; 2:16; 5:19; 9:15). Only 9:5; 11:8 and 12:1 are exceptions. However, in 9:5 it is used with the verb נִשְׁכַּח (has been forgotten). Thus זכר in 11:8 and 12:1 is unique. In 11:8 and 12:1, Qohelet reminds his audience that they should keep in mind that the time for enjoying life is brief and God can take their lives away at any time. Eccl. 12:1-7 seems to form a small unit describing the cycle of life from birth to death. It has been already pointed out that 1:2 and 12:8 form an *inclusio* for the book. Thus it can be said that the issue of death also forms an *inclusio* for the book. After the rhethorical question in 1:3, Qohelet begins his introductory poem by stating that a generation goes (dies). And in 12:7, he ends the concluding poem with the same idea.

From the evidence above, we may conclude that according to Qohelet, death is so powerful that it can bring everything to an end; nobody can escape from it. It has both positive and negative effects on human beings; human beings will not suffer after death and they will no longer be able to enjoy the sheer delight found in living. No matter how good people live, death brings them down to the same level as every other being (animals, the wicked, the fool). There is no direct correlation between actions and death. Death can happen by chance and it will come to everybody. Because of the reality of death, human beings should be humble and recognise their limitations. They are not in control of their own lives, but God is. When God takes back the life-breath, they are no more. Qohelet does not explicitly deny the existence of life after death, but he does not support this view either. He frequently questions it, pointing out that nobody will know for sure what will happen in the future. He does not want to postpone the experience of good things until life after death. He focuses on the ability to enjoy life in this world. He does see that there are many good things to enjoy in this world because he believes that God has created this world with abundant beauty. He keeps reminding his audience that life is short, so they should live their lives to the full. Though he recognises that there is injustice in this world, he does not try to resolve this problem by looking for vindication in the afterlife. He provides no solution for it but leaves it to God's free will. God can do anything to anybody as He pleases. Qohelet sees that it is ultimately futile to question God (8:4).[130]

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[130]Balentine (1983), 129. The king in Eccl. 8:4 may refer to God, for the language of 8:4b is virtually identical with Job 9:12.

Part Two

Chapter Eight

History of Buddhism in Thailand

Buddhism is the main religion of Thailand. More than 90% of its population claim to be Buddhists regardless of how little involvement they have in religious life. However, Buddhism did not start in Thailand. Like many countries in Asia, Thailand embraced Buddhism as its national religion many centuries ago. Buddhism is the religion of people who live in lands stretching from the island of Sri Lanka to the islands of Japan, and throughout large areas of the Asian mainland. The history of Buddhism spans almost 2,500 years from its origin in India, through its spread to most parts of Asia and, in the twentieth century, to the West.[1] Buddhism began as a small community within the society, civilization, and culture with which it coexisted. It is quite probable that Buddhism remained basically a sectarian religion until the time of King Asoka (third century B.C.E.).

The origin

The founder of Buddhism was the Buddha whose family name was Gotama (or Gautama), and his personal name Siddhattha (Siddhartha). Sometimes he is referred to as Sakyamuni, sage of the Sakyas.[2] His father was Suddhodhana, an aristocratic Hindu chieftain, and his mother Mahamaya. According to tradition the young prince was brought up in princely luxury. At the age of sixteen he married a beautiful wife. From this time on for about thirteen years he led a life of luxury and domestic happiness (like King Solomon in the Hebrew Bible). Eventually the prince drove through the streets of the city in a gaily decorated chariot, and he saw some unpleasant scenes: an old man with grey hair tottering out of a hut dressed in nothing but rags; a sick man twisting his body about in the dust, groaning and moaning and gasping for breath; a corpse being carried by a crowd of people who were weeping and wailing. After these experiences, he began to think about the mystery of life. He realised the sorrow which is present in the life of all men. He felt despair, pain, and sorrow. Later

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[1]Harvey (1990), 1.
[2]Jackson (1988), 311.

he used the term *dukkha*, loosely translated as "suffering", to express this fact of human life. Then he saw a serene and dignified hermit clothed in flowing orange-coloured robes. So the prince made up his mind to renounce the world, like the hermit, and to go in search of peace and security from the suffering of this mortal life. For six years he sought for a solution by practising extreme forms of asceticism. However, he realized that extreme asceticism was not the way, and he began to take his normal food again.

Finally Gotama sat under a peepul-tree, and vowed that he would not move until he had found the answer to his quest. Then, after forty-nine days of meditation, at the spot now known as Buddhagaya in Bihar, he made his final struggle and achieved enlightenment. He had found the solution to the riddle of life. He had gained insight into the *Dhamma* (the Truth). Thereafter he became known as the Buddha, which means "Enlightened One"[3] or "Awakened One".[4] In the Theravāda Buddhist scriptures, the *Tripitaka,* he is most commonly referred to as the Tathāgata, the "thus gone", which in Thailand is usually taken to mean the one who has attained the Buddhist spiritual perfection of *nibbāna*.[5] For forty-five years after that he travelled up and down northern India, teaching and preaching the message of hope and happiness, and making many converts. He lived a life of unceasing activity. He passed away at the age of eighty at Kusinara on a full-moon day.

Harvey suggests that "Buddha" is a title, so it should not be used as a name or referred to a unique individual.[6] He also points out that Buddhism is less focused on the person of its founder than is, for example, Christianity because the emphasis in Buddhism is on the *teachings* of the Buddha(s).[7] Theoretically, Harvey's observation is right, but it is not true in reality. In Thailand there are Buddha images all over the place. Though some Buddhists may say that these images are symbols that only represent the Buddha, Thai Buddhists in fact worship these images respectfully. One day a Thai Ph.D student who was doing her research in Glasgow saw a Buddha image displayed on a table for sale in a fair. She walked toward the table and paid her respect to the image before gently lifting it up. After examining it thoroughly, she gently put it back on the table and worshipped the image again. The vendor looked at her with surprise. The average Buddhist thinks of the Buddha as more than a man and finds in

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[3]Silva (1987), 126.
[4]Harvey (1990), 1.
[5]Jackson (1988), 311.
[6]Harvey (1990), 1.
[7]Harvey (1990), 1.

him the person with supreme authority in whom he may trust.[8] Gombrich notes that certain ceremonies performed before Buddha images are not compatible with the doctrinal position which states that the Buddha was a monk who is now dead.[9] One example is the Pali verse addressed to a Buddha image:

> Forgive me my transgression committed through carelessness by body, word or thought, O Tathāgata of great wisdom.[10]

Here a Buddha image is addressed as if it contained or embodied the living presence of the Buddha. More than that the specific name of the Buddha is used so it is specifically addressed to a particular person.

The Development of Buddhism

After the Buddha passed away, his disciples decided to hold a council to discuss about preserving the teachings of the Buddha. According to the Buddhist tradition there have been a number of significant councils in Buddhist history. However, tradition only agrees on a few of them. The first was held in the monsoon season following the death of the Buddha and the second was held about a hundred years later. The significance of the first council was that it saw the formation of the canon, by settling the contents of the three *Pitakas,* or Baskets, of the Canon.[11] The second council was called in order to solve the question of moderating the monastic rules which had been proposed by certain monks. When their proposals were condemned at the Council, the order split into two: the *Mahasanghikas* (Members of the Great Sangha), and the *Theravādins* (Adherents of the Teaching of the Elders).[12] The main doctrinal difference between the two parties seems to have been the means of attaining Buddhahood, the orthodox Elders (*Theravādins*) maintaining that it was the fruit of strict observance of the Rules, and the unorthodox minority holding, as the Mahāyāna holds today, that Buddhahood already dwells within, and only needs developing.[13] Although this schema is probably the most common one used by scholars to divide Buddhism into more manageable segments, it tends to overemphasize certain differences between them in an extreme way, beyond what is warranted by

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[8]Silva (1987), 145-146.
[9]Gombrich (1971), 139.
[10]Gombrich (1971), 140.
[11]Humphrey (1990), 45.
[12]Shin (1990), 23.
[13]Humphrey (1990), 45.

history.[14] Scholars have recognized that Buddhism has always been deeply shaped by its surrounding culture. It has shown an enduring tendency to adapt to local forms; as a result we can speak of a transformation of Buddhism in various cultures[15]. Accordingly, to understand Buddhism in Thailand, Thai culture needs to be studied. However, it is almost impossible to distinguish between Thai culture and Buddhism.

The continuation of the early Buddhist tradition was made possible by the Theravāda school which follows the "ancient" or "primordial" path of the Buddha.[16] The core of this path is the overcoming of suffering and the habituating bondage of our worldly actions through endless lives by means of an individual practice of meditation leading to a state of moral purity, mental equanimity, and profound insight into the ever-changing and impermanent nature of reality.[17] In contrast, the Mahāyāna school offers devotion to a number of holy saviour beings, and develops several sophisticated philosophies from earlier teachings.[18]

Theravāda thought and practice were increasingly adopted in India from the sixth to the third centuries B.C.E. The expansion of Buddhism in India was accomplished rapidly when King Asoka of Magadha, third emperor of the Mauryan dynasty, who reigned between 274-232 B.C.E., was converted to Buddhism.[19] His conversion probably took place at the conclusion of the Kalinga war (262 B.C.E.), eight years after his coronation when he was 42 years old.[20] With the reign of King Asoka, Buddhism entered a new phase of its history in which it became a "civilizational religion," that is a religion that was associated with a sophisticated high culture and that transcended the boundaries of local regions and politics. Also, the canonical texts were systematized and scrutinized by Pali commentators, a practice culminating in the work of the great Buddhaghosa (fifth century C.E.).[21]

Buddhism not only expanded in India, but it also expanded to many countries, even as far as Egypt, North Africa, Syria, and Macedonia, because Asoka traditionally sent Buddhist missionaries to these countries.[22] The historical origins of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka and the Southeast Asian mainland link to these missionaries.[23] Theravāda Buddhism may have become the "central value system" of Sri Lanka with

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[14]Reynolds and Hallisey (1987), 336.
[15]Reynolds and Hallisey (1987), 336.
[16]Harvey (1990), 2.
[17]Swearer (1991), 629.
[18]Harvey (1990), 2.
[19]Shin (1990), 23. De Silva [(1987), 136.] dates the Asoka reign between 269-237 B.C.E.
[20]Tambiah (1976), 55.
[21]Swearer (1991), 629.
[22]De Silva (1987), 136.
[23]Swearer (1991), 629-630.

the formal establishment of kingship during the reign of Tissa (250-210 B.C.E.).[24] The same claim can only be made for Thailand several hundred years later.[25]

During the Asokan and immediately post-Asokan era there are at least three specific developments that sustained the transformation of Buddhism into a civilizational religion. The first was a realignment in the structure of the religious community, involving an innovation in the relationship and balance between the monastic order and its lay supporters. Second, factions within the monastic community began to formulate aspects of the teachings more precisely, and to develop those teachings into philosophies that attempted to explain all of reality in a coherent and logically defensible manner. Third, symbolism, architecture, and ritual were developed. Some of these changes were related to the support Buddhism received from its royal and elite supporters.[26]

Buddhist Canons

Our knowledge of the teachings of the Buddha is based on several canons of scripture, which derive from the early *sangha*'s oral transmission of bodies of teachings agreed at several councils.[27] The texts accepted as canonical by the Theravāda school now predominant in Thailand were not written down until the first century B.C.E. when the Ceylonese Buddhist king Vattagamini had them inscribed on palm-leaf manuscripts.[28] These texts were actually written down some six hundred years after the Buddha's death.[29] The Theravādin Pali Canon is preserved in the Pali language, which is based upon a dialect close to that spoken by the Buddha, Old Māghadhī.[30] This language is a North Indian vernacular related to Sanskrit.[31]

The Pali Canon is usually called *Tripitaka* which means "three baskets" denoting the three wicker containers originally used for storing the main divisions of the palm-leaf manuscripts.[32] *Tripitaka* consists of three separate collections of texts which are:

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[24]Swearer (1991), 630.
[25]Swearer (1991), 630.
[26]Reynolds and Hallisey (1987), 339.
[27]Harvey (1990), 3.
[28]Jackson (1988), 312.
[29]De Silva (1987), 138.
[30]Harvey (1990),3.
[31]Jackson (1988), 312.
[32]Jackson (1988), 312.

1. *Vinaya-Pitaka* (the Discipline Basket), containing five books of detailed regulations of monastic discipline for monks and nuns.

2. *Sutta-Pitaka* (the Discourse Basket), containing collected discourses of the Buddha, together with shorter sayings, plus discussions about doctrine, which is generally called the *dhamma*.

3. *Abhidhamma-Pitaka* (the Metaphysical Basket), containing the writings of later scholars on doctrine and ethics. This is a philosophical development of some of the key ideas of the doctrine or *dhamma*.[33]

The main teachings of Buddhism are contained in the *suttas*, which in the Pali Canon are divided into five *Nikāyas* or "Collections", the first four (sixteen volumes) generally being older.[34] Most of the Pali Canon has been translated into Western languages[35] and also into the Thai language.

The *Sangha*

The Pali Canon is very important for Theravāda Buddhism because it preserves the traditional teachings of the Buddha. But it is of no value if nobody can read it or interpret it. Buddhist tradition has been passed on to Thailand until this day because there have been a number of monks who have continued studying the Pali Canon. Buddhist monks not only study the Buddhist scriptures themselves but also teach and explain their meaning to ordinary people. More important than their sermons is their lifestyle which demonstrates that they are true followers of the Buddhist ideal. The ideal Buddhist man should become a member of the *sangha* (the monastic institution) in order to pursue the Path. In practice, very few Thai men ever become members of the *sangha* for life, but it became the norm among people living in pre-modern Thailand for young men to spend at least a lenten period of three months as either a novice or a monk.[36] In terms of traditional and social esteem, a man who has not passed through monkhood is regarded as immature.[37] Men who have served as monks are "ripe" (*sug*); men who have not are "raw" (*dip*).[38] The classical rule is that to become a monk a man must be at least twenty years of age, and on ordination he undertakes to observe the 227 precepts.[39] Generally in Thailand, a village boy, who in the past

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[33]De Silva (1987), 138. Jackson (1988), 313.
[34]Harvey (1990), 3.
[35]Harvey (1990), 4.
[36]Keyes (1987), 417.
[37]Suksamran (1977), 5.
[38]Kirsch (1977), 250.
[39]Tambiah (1970), 97.

started as a temple boy, becomes a novice as an adolescent, then a celibate monk at the dawn of adulthood.[40] After a period of time, he resumes lay life to marry and set up a household and to materially support the monks in the temple. Later on, he can re-enter the *sangha* as many times as he wants. Monastic service may provide an increment of prestige, and possibly training in useful skills to be exploited on leaving the *sangha*. And the *sangha* has been an important vehicle for upward mobility in Thai society.[41] A Buddhist monk can be easily recognised in Thailand. He shaves his head, wears a yellow robe and wears no shoes. He is expected to live a life of utmost simplicity, owning no personal property or money, and he is supposed to get his food only by begging every morning. Hence he is called a *bhikku*–a beggar.[42] Monks are permitted to take meals only between sunrise and noon.

Generally, monks live in a *wat* (Buddhist temple) within a community. However, some monks may prefer to live in a forest monastery. Apart from studying Buddhist scriptures and practicing meditation, Buddhist monks who live in a community temple are expected to do pastoral duties such as preaching, conducting funerals, performing certain religious ceremonies, and providing religious education for the young. In former days, when the school system in the modern sense had not yet been set up, the monks were regarded as the most important teachers, and the *wat* was the major educational institution where both religious and secular subjects were taught.[43] In Thailand, monks are expected not to turn their backs on society but to render service when skills are needed and where no one else's competence is available.[44]

In Thailand, no women are ordained as nuns or *bhikkunīs*. The closest a woman can get towards sacred living is by joining the ascetics, by becoming a *chii*. She shaves her head and wears a white robe instead of a yellow robe. These women who carry the title *chii* are not members of the *sangha*. In the literary Buddhist tradition, there are examples and rules prescribing a monk's behaviour towards women members of the *sangha*. However, Thai Buddhists do not accept women into the *sangha*, probably because of the animistic worldview in which women are regarded as antithetic to the sacred beneficial power of monks.[45] The Venerable Wimonthitì gives the reason why women should not be admitted into the order:

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[40]Tambiah (1970), 140.
[41]Kirsch (1977), 250.
[42]De Silva (1987), 135.
[43]Suksamran (1977), 11.
[44]Suksamran (1977), 6.
[45]Terwiel (1979), 252.

> In the remote past there were indeed women in the Saṃgha but this practice has been given up long ago. The Lord Buddha in his wisdom never wanted women in the order, but when he was pursuaded he put so many safeguards up that it became virtually impossible for women to enter. In the first place a woman has to go into a prolonged novitiate which may last several years. In the second place the ordination ceremony would be most embarrassing for women because of the long and intimate questioning prescribed in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.[46]

Suksamran points out that the line of female ordination died out in Ceylon one thousand years ago.[47]

The Layperson

A layperson of whatever age or sex must show formal respect to a monk. The rules of contact with laypeople are particularly stringent in the case of women–not old women contact with whom gives no cause for public suspicion, but younger women, especially unmarried girls.[48] Traditionally, a basic obligation of the Buddhist layman has been that he should materially support wandering monks. Although today monks live in village monasteries, every morning Buddhist laypeople show their support by giving alms to monks. However, men never offer food to monks on their daily rounds, nor do they bring food to the monks' quarters for their midday meal.[49] Daily merit-making, then, is a function of women rather than men, but the latter also gain merit as heads and members of households. On the whole, the more conspicuous practising Buddhists are women rather than men.[50] The degree of involvement of women with Buddhism is relatively constant until, with advancing age, it may increase.[51] Although Thai women cannot be ordained, they take full responsibility for the survival of Buddhist monks.

Compared to Buddhist monks, Thai laypeople need to keep only five precepts, though the especially pious (often elderly) may occasionally volunteer to observe eight. In rural Thailand, the ritual of asking to receive the five precepts is a common event.[52] Any person who takes part in the usual communal religious services, which are held in private houses as well as in the monasteries, will have an opportunity to receive the five

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[46]Terwiel (1979), 252-253.
[47]Suksamran (1977), 1.
[48]Tambiah (1970), 141.
[49]Tambiah (1970), 143-144.
[50]Tambiah (1970), 144.
[51]Kirsch (1977), 251.
[52]Terwiel (1979), 183.

precepts many times a year, and on special days, when a major religious festival is celebrated, the precepts can be given several times a day.[53]

History of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand.

The classical period of Southeast Asian Buddhism, which lasted from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, began with the development of the monarchical states of Srivijaya in Java, Angkor in Cambodia, Pagan in Burma, Sukhothai in Thailand, and Luang Prabang in Laos, and culminated in the establishment of the normative Pali Theravāda tradition of the Sinhala Mahavihara monastic line.[54] The spread of Theravāda Buddhism among the Thai people began when they migrated from China, first from lower Burma from the seventh century onwards and secondly when northern Thailand was conquered by the Burmese Buddhist King Anawrahta in the eleventh century. The Thais adopted it as the state religion of their first kingdom founded in 1238 C.E. King Ramkamheang (1275-1300 C.E.) of the Sukhothai dynasty sent monks to Ceylon for higher training under a prestigious Sinhalese monk scholar and instituted a clerical hierarchy in his kingdom. The remarkable tradition is that on *uposatha* days[55] the king invited monks to come to the palace and sit on the Manansilapatra throne to expound the *dhamma*.[56] This implies that the king had accepted the superiority of the Buddhist religion. About 1360, a senior Sinhalese monk was invited by the royal court to preside over and validate the ordination ceremony, through which the Thai monks claimed to be in the orthodox line descending through the Mahavihara tradition from Mahinda.[57] Sukhothai kings were full supporters of Buddhism. King Lu Tai concluded his life around 1374, having engaged abundantly in those acts of building and repairing temples and other religious monuments that elicit the praises of the monk chroniclers.[58]

The classical Thai Buddhist worldview was set forth in the *Traibhumikatha* of King Lu Thai of Sukhothai. In laying out the traditional Buddhist stages of the deterioration of history, Lu Thai meant to affirm the meaningfulness of a kammically calculated human life within a given multitiered universe. Within its great chain of being framework of various human, heavenly, and demonic realms, the text focuses on

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[53]Terwiel (1979), 183.
[54]Swearer, "Buddhism in Southeast Asia", 386.
[55]Buddhist observance days which, according to the lunar cycle, fall on full-moon, new-moon and two half-moon days.
[56]Tambiah (1976), 85.
[57]Shin, p. 30.
[58]Tambiah (1976), 86.

a central figure, the universal monarch, or *cakkavattin*, exemplified by the legendary king Dharmasokaraja. Lu Thai's traditional picture of the world, the role of the king, the nature of *kammic* action, and the hope of a heavenly reward provide a rationale for the Sukhothai political, social, and religious order. That king Rama I (1782-1809), who reestablished the fortunes of the Thai monarchy, commissioned a new recension of the *Traibhumi* testifies to its longevity and also to its utility as a charter for order and stability during yet another time of political and social disruption.

It is said that Buddhism in the Sukhothai period was particularly prosperous, when the paternal relationship between king and people was inspired and supported by the principles of the Theravāda tradition.[59] King Ramkamheang once said:

> If people are in good morality, and have a high spirit, by keeping steadfast to Buddhism and adhering to Dhamma, the nation will be tranquil and prosperous.[60]

After Sukhothai fell under the control of Ayuthaya, the paternal element was submerged and was not revived until the later Chakri dynasty.[61] In the Ayuthaya period (1350-1767), court traditions, especially after the fifteenth century, showed strong Brahmanic influences, and influences from Angkor (Cambodia), which the Thai had conquered.[62] Thus Hinduism travelled to Thailand along a different route: from India to Cambodia and thence to Thailand. Thailand, in its Ayuthaya period, heavily influenced by Angkor, similarly depended on a *brahman* priesthood to conduct the royal rituals of installation and coronation, first ploughing, the swing ceremony and top-knot cutting.[63] It is interesting to note that Buddhism had separated from Hinduism and gone to Sri Lanka and spread to Thailand and in the end rejoined Hinduism again in Thailand. Later when Bangkok became the capital of Thailand, its first rulers downplayed the Brahmanic state cult in favour of such Buddhist activities as unifying the *sangha,* restoring the scriptures, and sponsoring public almgiving.[64] However at the end of the nineteenth century, King Chulalongkorn (c. 1868-1910) restored many Brahmanic state rites in an effort to enhance the image of the monarchy.[65]

As the first representative of a new dynasty, King Rama I engaged in acts that bear the characteristic marks of an assertive king seeking legitimacy and stability within

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[59]Suksamran (1977), 24.
[60]Suksamran (1977), 23.
[61]Suksamran (1977), 24.
[62]Keyes (1987), 417.
[63]Tambiah (1970), 253.
[64]Keyes (1987), 417.
[65]Keyes (1987), 417.

the orthodoxy of a Buddhist polity. These acts are the purification of the *sangha*, the enactment of new *sangha* laws, the sponsorship of a revised Buddhist canon and a new version of the historic cosmological work, *Traiphum*.[66] The *Traiphum* contained a very central section which described and extolled the ideal reigns of the great *Chakkavatti* king and of the more "historical" model of Buddhist royalty–King Asoka.[67]The purification of the *sangha* was necessary because it had suffered from the ravages of the Burmese war of 1767 and, subsequently, had been embroiled in schismatic dissension during the later years of King Taksin's reign.[68]

King Mongkut, crowned in 1851, was interested in and open to Western technology and culture. In 1867, *Kitchanukit* (A Book Explaining Various Things) was published to explain events not in terms of traditional cosmological and mythological sources but using astronomy, geology, and medicine. The *Kitchanukit* presents Buddhism as primarily a system of social ethics; heaven and hell are not places but have a moral or pedagogical utility; *kamma* is not an actual causal force but a genetic principle that accounts for human diversity. King Mongkut's successor, his son Chulalongkorn, moved even further from the mythic cosmology of the traditional Southeast Asian Buddhist worldview, declaring the *Traibhumi* (*Traiphum*) to be simply an act of imagination.[69] Perhaps King Mongkut's most important undertaking was to establish the pure Pali canon, because the extant Thai collections of the *Tripitaka* were judged both defective and incomplete.[70] In addition to "scripturalism", we may add "rationalism" as still another component of King Mongkut's reformist movement. This rationalism is in many ways a response to the impact of Western ideas received in the form of a curious combination of science, technology, and the theology of the missionaries.[71] In his attempt to purify the *sangha*, King Mongkut created a reformist group of monks in certain monasteries in Bangkok. This group later became the strict Thammayut sect within the Thai *sangha*.[72] His successor, King Rama V, created the higher educational institutions for monks which later became Buddhist universities.[73]

Throughout Thai history, Thai kings have been protectors and promoters of Buddhism. Nowadays, the king still plays an important though mainly symbolic role

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[66]Tambiah (1976), 183.
[67]Reynolds (1977), 271.
[68]Tambiah (1976), 183.
[69]Swearer,"Buddhism in Southeast Asia", 395.
[70]Tambiah (1976), 212.
[71]Tambiah (1976), 212.
[72]Suksamran (1977), 26.
[73]Suksamran (1977), 26.

in Thai Buddhism.[74] However, when revolution brought about the disruption of monarchical government in 1932, civil government took over from the king the responsibility to promote and protect Buddhism. Suksamran points out that the rationale for the deep involvement of the government in religious affairs can be expressed as follows:

> (1) the promotion and protection of Buddhism has been one of the chief responsibilities of every Thai government; (2) the government's promotion of Buddhism would help to end or, at least, lessen lawlessness and disorder in the country and to strengthen the nation's moral fibre; (3) as the effect of the spread of Communist ideology and activity is to jeopardize national security, ensuring the healthy condition of Buddhism is the most effective counter-measure.[75]

In return for promotion of the *sangha*'s affairs, the government expects to exercise control and supervision in many other spheres.[76] However, the government also needs support from the religious body. In the post-1932 period, Thai Buddhism has contributed to socio-political stability because it has been scrupulously neutral in the political arena and its leading practitioners (Buddhist monks) have been themselves highly respected, indeed, venerated.[77] Thus the Thai *sangha* has been able to legitimize recent Thai governments.

The reformation of Buddhism in Thailand

In the past the purification of the Thai *sangha* and the reform of Buddhism in Thailand were initiated by the kings. According to Thai tradition, the Thai king was looked upon as himself a Buddha or Bodhisattva for his subjects, as an embodiment of the Dhamma and the one responsible for its implementation within his realm, and as the protector of the *sangha* or Buddhist order.[78] But in the modern period, the reform of Buddhism has been initiated by ordinary monks. At present there are many Buddhist movements; some of them still remain in the *sangha*; some do not. According to Thai people, Buddhism is not only a personal affair, but a national affair, so they have to do everything they can for the survival of Buddhism.

The modernization and reform of Buddhism in Thailand in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was part of a general trend in all the Southeast Asian Buddhist countries. In 1956 and 1957 , a general Buddhist council was held in Burma.

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[74]Suksamran (1977), 27.
[75]Suksamran (1977), 27.
[76]Suksamran (1977), 29.
[77]Pinker (1973), 65.
[78]Reynolds (1973), 41.

Doctrinal reinterpretation has followed three major lines: an emphasis on the ethical dimensions of the tradition at the expense of the supernatural and mythical; a rejection of magical elements of popular thought and practice as incompatible with the authentic tradition; and a rationalization of Buddhist thought in terms of Western categories, along with an apologetic interest in depicting Buddhism as scientific. Generally speaking Buddhist apologists have attempted to prove that Buddhism is more scientific than other religions, particularly Christianity; that the empirical approach or methodology of Buddhism is consistent with modern science; and that science proves or validates particular Buddhist teachings.[79]

The influence of the West is quite prominent in Thailand. The curriculum of the great *sangha* university in Bangkok includes, at least nominally, most of the disciplines of the modern university in the West.[80] If a monk wants to resume the role of community leader, he needs to engage in a whole range of modern activities especially development projects. During the year 1965-66, the Ministry of Education made a request to the new Supreme Patriarch of the Thai *sangha* for large numbers of monks to be made available for teaching in the government schools, in view of the expansion of the schools and the shortage of teachers. There was no answer immediately forthcoming from the Supreme Patriarch. On the one hand he would have liked to embrace the opportunity for monks to have a distinctive influence in Thai education, but on the other hand, he was candidly dubious about the competence of monks in any large numbers to carry on such educational activities.[81]

At present Buddhist interpreters, such as the Thai monk Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa, have referred to Buddhism as a practical system of personal and social morality. *Nibbāna*, for Buddhadāsa, is the state that is achieved when egoism is overcome. Buddhadāsa's critique reflects the magical nature of popular Buddhist ritual practice, the goal of which is to improve one's life materially through the mechanism of gaining merit or improving one's *kammic* status.[82] Buddhadāsa has been criticized for being overly intellectual. Yet, the core of his concern as a teacher and apologist for Buddhism in Thailand is not theoretical but practical. His idiosyncratic interpretation of the universal and unqualified nature of Buddhist truth stems from the traditional Theravāda view that man is hopelessly bound by the conceits of "me" and "mine" and that these conceits must be broken down before there is any chance of personal or

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[79]Swearer,"Buddhism in Southeast Asia", 396.
[80]Morgan (1973), 71.
[81]Morgan (1973), 71-72.
[82]Swearer,"Buddhism in Southeast Asia", 399.

societal peace and happiness.[83] His concern is to restore Buddhism to a place of importance in the lives of Thai Buddhists by making its ultimate aim not something inaccessible, but a goal to be realized in this life.[84] However, the realisation of Buddhadāsa's ideas in Thai social life would require the existence of an educated audience with enough social and political power to restructure social relations according to their modernist Buddhist ideals.[85]

Another leading monk in Thailand is Pra Rājavaramuni who writes for a more learned audience. He continues to teach Buddhism according to tradition and defends its authenticity. His *Phutthatham* (*Buddhadhamma*), published in 1982, has been acclaimed as one of the most significant works on Theravāda ethics ever written.[86] Though his interpretation of Buddhism is in line with tradition, he has sought also to make the Buddhist message relevant to modern life. He does not modify any concept of Buddhism, but he tries to apply the teachings of Buddhism to the modern life of the Thai people. He has written Buddhist educational literature in Thai since not many Thais in this modern world know Pali. Those who want to approach Buddhism intellectually find this literature useful.

Though many educated Buddhists see the significance of improving the standard of Thai Buddhism intellectually, other Buddhists turn towards practical developments. A new interest in the significance of meditation for Buddhist practice has started after Achan Man Phūrithattha (Bhūridatto Thera), a monk from northeastern Thailand who died in 1949 at the age of 78, concluded early in his life that to follow the Path to ultimate salvation, one must withdraw from the world and devote one's life to meditation.[87] Forest monasteries today are popular retreats for urban laypersons who seek to temper their active involvement in the world with a detachment that comes from meditation practice. Meditation centres have been established all over the country, in cities and rural areas.

Although most leaders of Buddhists are monks, there are many lay Buddhist leaders who have contributed to a widening discourse on the relevance of religious values for public life. Among the best known is Sulak Sivarksa, who has exerted a significant influence through his numerous essays and the organizations he has helped to create.[88] He argues that only religion can bring out the true value of human development and he believes that this development should reduce craving, avoid

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[83]Swearer (1973), 83.
[84]Swearer (1973), 84.
[85]Jackson (1988),308.
[86]Keyes (1987), 419.
[87]Keyes (1987), 419.
[88]Keyes (1987), 419.

violence, and enhance the spiritual and moral dimensions of life as well as the material.[89] Many times he used non-violent methods to fight against injustice and he was exiled to foreign countries. He has been frequently invited to speak overseas because of his good reputation as a scholar. He is a liberal lay reformer and human rights activist.

The new Buddhist movements not only derive from the liberal wing, but also from the fundamentalist wing. In Thailand, there are at least three right wing groups. One of these groups was led by Kittiwutthō Phikkhu (Kittivuḍḍho Bhikkhu), who gained notoriety in the mid-1970s for arguing that killing communists was not murder as understood in Buddhist terms and thus did not produce demerit.[90] The other two are Dhammakaya and Santi Asoka. Dhammakaya represents a mainstream fundamentalist revivalism with strong nationalistic overtones, a movement which can be seen as a particular transformation of Thai civil religion.[91] The Dhammakaya movement is characterized by a strong leadership centralized in its two cofounders, the current abbot Chaiyaboon Sitthiphon and the assistant abbot Phadet Phongasawad.[92] Instead of building more Dhammakaya temples (*wats*) throughout Thailand, Dhammakaya actively recruits members and buses them to the thousand-acre headquarters at Prathum Thani near Bangkok. The focus on a single national centre recreates the old galactic polity[93] model and thereby restores the vivid and dynamic past of the Ayutthaya kingdom.[94] Moreover, the movement has built centres for lay meditation in over two-thirds of Thailand's provinces and has made extensive use of the national network of schools at all levels, in particular post-secondary institutions.[95] The movement has not yet developed a nuanced philosophical analysis of the world based on a wide range of Buddhist texts or even sophisticated apologetic. Instead, its basic teachings are relatively simple and primarily ethical in nature.[96] Despite its simple teaching, this movement is able to recruit many well educated Thais. The monks of the Dhammakaya movement are university educated.[97] The success of the movement may be derived from its technically sophisticated and highly developed publications and media network.[98] However, it seems possible that Thai people are more concerned with

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[89]Swearer, "The Buddhist Tradition in Today's World", 70.
[90]Keyes (1987), 419.
[91]Swearer (1991), 656.
[92]Swearer (1991), 656.
[93]a polity composed of a grouping around a centre.
[94]Swearer (1991), 657.
[95]Swearer (1991), 658.
[96]Swearer (1991), 662.
[97]Swearer (1991), 665.
[98]Swearer (1991), 656.

religious practices that are pure and moral rather than ritual and ceremonial. When they experience progress they want to continue on. Another important thing is that this movement has two strong leaders that they can follow.

In contrast to Dhammakaya, Santi Asoka may be seen as a form of sectarian fundamentalist revivalism on the periphery of the sociocultural mainstream.[99] This movement has centres in Bangkok, Nakorn Pathom, Sisaket, and Nakorn Sawan. Santi Asoka declared itself independent of the national *sangha* hierarchy. In fact, the Santi Asoka monks were recently defrocked by the government.[100] Nevertheless, they still practice like monks in their own way. Although Chamlong Srimuang the former governor of Bangkok and still prominent in Thai politics has been an active member of Santi Asoka, high-ranking government and military officials and royalty are notably absent from their larger gatherings.[101] Its supporters come largely from a middle-class constituency, especially Bangkokians. Santi Asoka attacks conventional social ills such as prostitution and violence and advocates an extraordinarily high standard of personal discipline and moral virtue (e.g., vegetarianism and the rejection not only of alcohol but also of stimulants such as coffee and tea).[102] Apart from using publications to promote its ideology, Santi Asoka has opened many vegetarian restaurants to sell foods and promote its beliefs. The movement's reputation is based on its adherence to a strict moral code characterized in particular by vegetarianism. Santi Asoka eliminates social distinctions (between monk and layperson) and gender distinctions, but uses moral distinctions instead.[103] Santi Asoka is quite small in comparison to Wat Dhammakaya, but its members are very dedicated and committed to the movement. Santi Asoka is quite radical when compared with Dhammakaya. Santi Asoka has altogether banned images of the Buddha from its assembly halls.[104] The Santi Asoka philosophy not only aims at cleansing individual character, but also addresses the ills of Thai social, political, and economic life more rigorously than the Dhammakaya movement. The Bangkokians seemed to agree with this ideology so they elected Chamlong Srimuang as governor for two terms.

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[99]Swearer (1991), 656.
[100]Swearer (1991), 667.
[101]Swearer (1991), 667.
[102]Swearer (1991), 667.
[103]Swearer (1991), 672.
[104]Swearer (1991), 667.

Conclusion

It is very difficult to get a picture of true Buddhism in Thailand nowadays. There are many groups who claim that they are more authentic than other groups. Moreover, in Thai religion there are at least three components: Buddhism, a Brahmanistic component and an animistic component.[105] Since Thailand is being influenced by the West we may add secularism. However, the Thai people still hold that Buddhism is an important part of their identity and it is one of the main institutions that holds the Thai people together. In contemporary Thailand, Buddhism is recognized as the state religion and enjoys special government support. Though there may be many interpretations of Buddhist teachings, the main concepts of Buddhism are known by most ordinary Thais. Theravāda Buddhism maintains its unity and continuity through a common core of doctrines and rituals sustained and perpetuated by the monastic institution the *sangha*.[106] Because Thailand follows the Theravāda tradition, Pali terms are in more general use than Sanskrit terms. Therefore the Buddhist terms in this thesis will be in Pali except when directly quoted from other scholars. This thesis will investigate these concepts at a doctrinal level and see how they are understood by modern Thais. Kirsch argues that, "in Thai society, the values and beliefs of Buddhism are not restricted to a small group of virtuosos and literati, but influence the mass of Thai [*sic*]".[107] Later these concepts will be compared with some of the concepts found in Ecclesiastes.

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[105]Kirsch (1977), 244.
[106]Kirsch (1977), 245.
[107]Kirsch (1977), 245.

Chapter Nine

Kamma

Though Buddhism is quite different from Hinduism, it still shares one common idea with Hiduism, which is the cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). Gombrich points out: "the Buddha and his listeners had presumably been brought up to believe in karma".[1] Streeter comments that while the Buddha constantly deprecated metaphysical speculation, he took for granted, as something not in need of proof, the doctrines of *Kamma* and *Maya*.[2] Thai people call the cycle of rebirths *kan vien vai tai kerd* (การเวียนว่ายตายเกิด). Other terms for rebirth are reincarnation, metempsychosis, transmigration, palingenesis, and re-embodiment.[3] The basic meaning of *saṃsāra* is "wandering on", which indicates that the process is seen as a long and often aimless process.[4] The cycle of rebirths is the human predicament, the painful experience of human beings. In Thailand, both in villages and cities, there is great ritual emphasis placed on death. In Bangkok, all the temple halls (*sala* ศาลา) and even tents of famous temples are used to conduct funeral services. There are more than ten of these halls in each of these famous temples. Before attending a funeral service we need to find out the number of the hall, otherwise, one will be lost. A funeral service for each individual lasts for several days. Thai Buddhists give a strong emphasis on death because they see it as the most important rite of passage.[5]

Tambiah, in his study at Baan Phraan Muan, a village in North-east Thailand, explains:

> First, death causes a change in man's status, and his fate after death is defined in terms of *bun/baab* and *kam* (*karma*), and rebirth. Village mortuary rites not only state the change in status but are also concerned to secure for the dead a good status by merit-making and transfer of merit. Participation in mortuary rites is itself defined as merit-making for the living. Death brings into action the village social structure, especially the relationships and obligations *vis-à-vis* different generations. These in particular include the ritual obligations of the junior generation of *lung-laan* to the senior generation of *phuu thaw*. The second focus of interest is the role of the monk in mortuary rites. Monks in their ritual roles have often been described as mediators between death and rebirth.[6]

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[1]Gombrich (1975), 214.
[2]Streeter (1932), 194.
[3]Head and Cranston (1961), viii.
[4]Harvey (1990), 32.
[5]Tambiah (1970), 179.
[6]Tambiah (1970), 179.

Death is not the end of the relationship within the family. Many Buddhists continue to transfer their merits to the dead; the deceased parents and elders become ancestral spirits.[7] The transfer of merit by the living to the dead may come from the hope that the dead will be reborn in a better status. Harvey notes: "This practice may have originated as a Buddhist adaptation of the Brahmanical *śrāddha* ceremony, in which gifts were seen as transferred to deceased relatives by giving them to Brahmins at memorial rites at various intervals after a death in the family".[8] How soon will a person be reborn after passing away? De Silva explains the teaching of the Buddha in the following way: "The dying individual with his whole being convulsively clinging to life, at the very moment of his death, sends forth karmic energy which, like a flash of lightning, hits at a new mother's womb ready for conception".[9] Many Buddhists continue to transfer merits to their loved ones even though they passed away many years ago. There is probably a hope that merits can be transferred even when the dead has been reborn. Harvey describes:

> Theravāda rites for the dead therefore include the feeding of monks and the transference of the auspicious quality of the deed ('merit') to the deceased, or whatever other ancestors may be *petas*, in the hope that this will ease their lot as *petas* or help them to a better rebirth. This is done especially seven days after a death, but also in yearly memorial services.[10]

According to Buddhist tradition, a *peta* lives in the spirit-sphere which is lower than the human-sphere. Gombrich explains that the deceased only rejoice and benefit from the merit if he is reborn as a *peta*, because if he is higher than that he does not need the merit, if he is lower, in hell, he cannot get it.[11] Obviously, not every dead man will be reborn as a *peta*. No one knows for certain what sphere the deceased will be reborn. Thai people continue to transfer merits to the loved ones who passed away because it is possible that they may be reborn as *petas*. If the dead man is not reborn as a *peta*, the living earns merit alone. Whatever happens to the dead the living still receives the benefit from the merit he makes for the dead.

Some people may wonder what part of human beings will be reborn. This question can be answered according to Buddhist understanding:

> At death the consciousness perishes, only to give birth to another consciousness in a subsequent birth. This renewed life-flux inherits all past experiences. This new being is neither absolutely the same as the past one because of its different

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[7]Tambiah (1970), 190.
[8]Harvey (1990), 43. See also Gombrich (1971), 228.
[9]De Silva (1979), 40.
[10]Harvey (1990), 43.
[11]Gombrich (1971), 231. See more detail about the spheres of different kinds of beings later on in this chapter.

> composition, nor totally different, being the identical strain of karmic-energy. (*Na ca so na ca aññ*o–'he is neither the same nor another.').[12]

The concept of rebirth is not only a matter of a better future but it is also a matter of past lives. According to Buddhism, each individual has innumerable past lives.[13] The Buddha talked about his enlightenment:

> I directed my mind to the knowledge and recollection of former habitations: I remembered a variety of former habitations, thus: one birth, two births, three... four... five... ten... twenty... thirty... forty...fifty... a hundred... a thousand... a hundred thousand births, and many an eon of integration and many an eon of disintegration and many an eon of integration-disintegration; such a one was I by name, having such and such a clan, such and such a colour, so was I nourished, such and such pleasant and painful experiences were mine, so did the span of life end.
>
> *Majjhima-Nikāya* I, 22.[14]

Despite this claim, the Buddha's view, in fact, is that there is no known beginning to the cycle of rebirths and the world:

> Incalculable is the beginning, brethren, of this faring on. The earliest point is not revealed of the running on, the faring on, of beings cloaked in ignorance, tied to craving.[15]

This statement suggests that Buddhism is agnostic about the beginning of human beings and the world. However some scholars incline to say that Buddhism is atheistic. There are some Buddhists who are atheists because they are not able to accept the idea that this world was created by God. They insist on the idea that the beginning of the world is unknown to human beings. Moreover, the Buddhists find it very difficult to comprehend the concept of a personal God, because if God is conceived of as personal then he must liable to change, for change is the essence of "personality".[16] The Buddhists cannot understand a God to whom is ascribed some sort of body, a God who loves, who becomes angry, who wants this or that, and who can do both good and bad.[17]

Though the Buddha did not give any answer about the beginning of the cycle of rebirths, he did explain why the process of rebirths is carried on and on. His teaching is that *taṇhā* (thirst, desire, craving), which manifests itself in various ways, is that which gives rise to rebirth.[18] This is the will to live, striving for existence by way of

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[12]De Silva (1979), 40.
[13]Harvey (1990), 32.
[14]*Majjhima Nikaya: The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings,* Vol. I (1954), 28.
[15]*Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Vol.II (1922), 118.
[16]Thaiwatcharamas (1983), 304. See also Davis (1993), 43.
[17]Thaiwatcharamas (1983), 304.
[18]De Silva (1979), 37.

good or bad actions (*kamma*). The present condition of each individual is caused by his actions in previous lives. And his actions in this life will effect his well-being in his next life. The cycle of rebirths will move on as long as *kamma* persists. What makes for a good rebirth is merit (*bun* บุญ), and what makes for a bad rebirth is demerit (*bap* บาป). One *sutta*[19] states:

> Beings are the owners of their *kamma*, heirs of their *kamma*, born of their *kamma*, related to their *kamma*, suppoted by their *kamma*. Whatever *kamma* they do, for good or for bad, of that they are the heirs.
>
> *Anguttura Nikaya*, V, 288.[20]

The Law of *Kamma* has nothing to do with God. It is solely man himself who is the cause and effect of his own deed as is said in Dhammapada:

> By oneself the evil is done, and it is oneself who suffers: by oneself the evil is not done, and by one's Self one becomes pure. The pure and the impure come from oneself: no man can purify another.
>
> *Dhammapada* vs. 165.[21]

Through the Law of *Kamma*, human beings are their own creators and moulders. *Kamma* is a dynamic quality in man which controls and cultivates the end result of each individual. This concept seems to depend on the will of each individual. It leads to self-reliance, without complaint about the circumstances and no intention to turn toward God for help. Whatever happens to a person at present seems to be the results of the influence of the past *kamma* and the present will. However, each action will have some consequence in due time. Humphrey states:

> Now Karma involves the element of time; and it is unreasonable to hold that all the causes generated in an average life will produce their full effect before the last day of that period. The oldest sage would admit that at the close of a life of study his wisdom was as a raindrop to the sea.[22]

The cycle of rebirths does not involve only human forms, but many other forms of life, such as animals. Some actions of human beings may cause them to be reborn in the animal realm. In the same way some actions of animals will upgrade them to the human realm at rebirth. According to Buddhist tradition, there are five states of existence: (1) the lower worlds (*duggati, vinipāta, niraya*); (2) the animal kingdom (*tiracchānayoni*); (3) the spirit-sphere (*pettivisaya*) or sphere of ghost-beings and demons; (4) realm of human beings (*manussā*); and (5) realm of gods (*devaloka*) and higher beings or spirits; this realm is known as the Formless realm (*arūpaloka*) where

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[19]a collection of sayings
[20]cited in *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 57.
[21]*The Dhammapada* (1973), 59.
[22]Humphrey (1990), 103.

the spirits have no bodily form.[23] From this division we can see that Buddhists do not deny the existence of gods since they designate a realm for them. All Thai have become thoroughly acquainted with a few gods, such as *Pra In* and *Pra Prom* (พระอินทร์กับพระพรหม) When they invoke a blessing at New Year, they call upon "the whole host of heaven", who they acknowledge without question or reservation, as personal beings who are both powerful enough to bestow blessing and who are of the essence good. They pray, "May all the powerful heavenly beings bless you" (ขอให้สิ่งศักดิ์สิทธิ์ทั้งหลายทั่วสากลโลกจงอวยพรท่าน).[24] Harvey sees this involvement of many forms of life as helping to re-adjust populations between the realms because a being may be reborn in another sphere in his next life.[25] According to this understanding, it seems that there will be no chance for population explosion at all, especially when many beings are in the highest realm because they have no bodily form.

The term *kamma* , literally means action or deed, that is the law of *kamma* is the law of cause and effect, the logical consequence of deeds.[26] However, Buddhists do not consider the law of *kamma* as a stick rule because people can still be liberated from this law. Moreover, our experiences in the present are not the result of our past *kamma* alone, but the mixture of various factors. One *sutta* states:

> Those monks and priests who say or hold the view that whatever pleasant or unpleasant or neutral feeling a person experiences is the consequence of what was done in the past they go too far. Therefore, I say they are wrong.
>
> Experiences of feelings arise from bile, from phlegm, from wind, from the union of bodily humours, from seasonal changes, from stress of circumstances, and from chance external happenings, as well as from the ripening of *kamma*.
>
> *Samyutta Nikaya,* IV, 230.[27]

One factor that Buddhists will not consider is the intervention of a creator. Buddhism sees no need for a creator of the world, as it postulates no ultimate beginning to the world, and regards it as sustained by natural laws.[28] Rājavaramuni a well known Buddhist scholar in Thailand, divides the natural laws into five categories:

> 1. อุตุนิยาม (*Utuniyāma* or Physical law) It is the law which relates to material thing, especially the order of environment and the changing of things...
> 2. พีชนิยาม (*Bījaniyāma* or Biological Law) It is the law which relates to reproduction or heredity...
> 3. จิตตนิยาม (*Cittaniyāma* or Psychic Law) It is the law which relates to the reaction of mind...

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[23]De Silva (1979), 39.
[24]Davis (1993), 45.
[25]Harvey (1990), 33.
[26]De Silva (1979), 37.
[27]cited in *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 59.
[28]Harvey (1990), 36.

> 4. กรรมนิยาม (*Kammaniyāma* or the Law of *Kamma*) It is the law which relates to human behaviours. That is the process of enforcing actions and creating an outcome. Or specifically speaking: it is the process of intention...
> 5. ธรรมนิยาม (*Dhammaniyāma* or the Law of the *Dhamma*) It is the law which relates to the relationship and the co-ordination between cause and effect of all things, especially those that are called common things...[29]

Rājavaramuni emphasises that these natural laws help people to learn and understand a common phenomenon of life and to live accordingly. He argues that those who understand these laws do not need to worry about a creator because the laws already exist and we do not need the creator (God) to originate the rules. He insists that if there is a creator, there must be another being over this creator otherwise he will change the rules whenever he likes.[30] Other main arguments against the existence of God are the problems of human free will and the existence of evil.[31] Rājavaramuni challenges that if there is a creator he should not allow people to be born as disabled, lame, or mentally handicapped.[32] According to Buddhist teaching God is *avijja* which is the very essence of ignorance itself.[33] Petsongkram an ex-Buddhist scholar explains the meaning of *avijja*:

> There are eight kinds of avijja and two possible interpretations of the term, Ignorant One (ตัวอวิชชา). The first interpretation is ignorance or a state of not knowing; the second is Nature which is unknowing. The second one is probably better. Buddha said that avijja is the creator of the world. What is avijja? It is that which Buddha did not yet know. He did not, by his own wisdom, know who the creator was. In the textbooks of Buddhism, the word avijja is interpreted as natural law which is ignorant. But Buddhadasa does not interpret it that way. He construes it as a state of not knowing. So his translation is the same as saying that God is ignorance, stupidity. In reality, avijja probably should be understood to mean the law of nature which man cannot know through his own intelligence. If that is what is meant, we can agree.[34]

In light of this Petsongkram agrees with Buddhists that God is *avijja* in a latter sense. Human beings cannot fully understand God and natural laws. There are many aspects of God that Christians cannot apprehend. Likewise there are many aspects of natural laws that Buddhists cannot explain.

On another occasion Buddhadāsa equates God to natural laws. He argues:

> Natural Law governs all things. Natural Law has power over all things. Hence in Dhamma language, the word "God" means, among other things, the Law of Nature,

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[29]This quotation is translated from the Thai language in Rājavaramuni (1988), 6-7.
[30]Rājavaramuni (1988), 9.
[31]Thaiwatcharamas (1983), 304.
[32]Rājavaramuni (1988), 9-10.
[33]Thaiwatcharamas (1983), 308.
[34]Petchsongkram (1975), 77-78.

> what Buddhists call Dhamma. In the Pali language, the Law of Nature was referred to simply as "Dhamma." Dhamma, just that one single word, implies all of the Law of Nature. So Dhamma is the Buddhist God.[35]

This time instead of looking down on the creator God of Christianity, Buddhadāsa replaces God with Dhamma or Natural Law and suggests that it has the same power as the Christian God for it has power over all things. This equation leads the concept of natural laws into the same situation as the Christian God. When one sees injustice in the world will one blame Dhamma?

Rājavaramuni acknowledges that any event in this world may be the result of the combination of these five natural laws. However, when he considers human affairs, he gives the Law of *Kamma* as the precedence because he thinks that human beings are originators of their *kamma,* and in the same way *kamma* is an originator of their destiny.[36] On one hand, it can be said that the Law of *Kamma* is fixed. But on the other hand it can be changed by human beings themselves. If we compare Buddhism and Christianity in this respect, Buddhism is human centred and Christianity is God centred. For Buddhism, human beings use the Law of *Kamma* to relate themselves with other natural laws. And the participation of human beings in other natural laws allows them to control natural laws via the Law of *Kamma*.[37] It seems that Buddhism uses the Law of *Kamma* to replace the role of God in Christianity.[38] Therefore the problem raised by Rājavaramuni about the rules being changed by God is also found in the Law of *Kamma* since human beings can always change their mind. They can confuse the natural laws if they want to.

As the concept of God as the creator is challenged by atheists, the Law of *Kamma* is questioned by many educated Thai. In 1975, Gosling conducted a survey among educated Thais, he summarised the result:

> Many educated Thai no longer believe that they will be reborn after death. Far from reflecting the kind of secularism and erosion of religious belief familiar in the west, this attitude exists within a context of continued strength and influence of the Thai church or Sangha.
>
> In the last few years there has been a growing interest in Thai Theravada Buddhism among social scientists and others, and a greater awareness of its distinctive features. These include the popular belief in spirits and the soul (both denied by the Buddha), and the notion of 'merit'. Most university graduates will at some time or other during their teens have been Buddhist monks for a period, and during this time will have become familiar with the Pali Canon. Their knowledge of Buddhism and respect for the Sangha appear to be largely moulded by their own

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[35]Buddhadāsa (1988), 32.

[36]Rājavaramuni (1988), 10.

[37]Rājavaramuni (1988), 11.

[38]See also David Lim (1983, p. 271) who states that other scholars "hold that in Buddhism the natural law of Karma (cause and effect) takes the place of the personal God as the final cause and exclusive principle of the universe, beyond which no divine personality exists".

> experience as monks. The Sangha as a whole continues to reiterate its belief in rebirth, and organisations such as the World Federation of Buddhists are currently publishing literature designed to prove that Buddhism is compatible with the findings of modern science, but many educated Thai are unconvinced.
>
> Among those for whom the traditional ideas of *karma* and rebirth have little or no significance are a cross-section of Thai graduates scientists who answered questions or came for interview in an investigation currently being conducted in Thailand by myself under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council. Most of these young scientists are Theravada Buddhists, and scientific advances in biology and genetics have shaken their belief in rebirth.[39]

Aware of this crisis Buddhadāsa has resolved the problem by reinterpreting the concept of rebirth in line with scientific evidence. Gosling comments:

> Curiously enough, the most popular reinterpretation of this article of faith, and one which seems incompatible with the Pali Canon, is that of an extremely influential monk known as Buddhadasa (or Putata in Thai), who maintains that each person is born at every moment in his life. The individual who thinks evil is born at that moment as an evil being, whereas someone who thinks compassionately is reborn to be increasingly kind and good. It seems that many educated Thai, including the small but influential scientific community for whom advances in science are posing genuine intellectual problems for religious belief, are discovering in Buddhadasa's expositions an acceptable interpretation of the doctrine of rebirth.[40]

This attempt by Buddhadasa suggests that the Law of *Kamma* remains a crucial concept that Thai Buddhists are not willing to give up. They can by-pass the beginning of the world, but they cannot let-go the Law of *Kamma*. It is an important concept to explain the existence of suffering in the world. However, Buddhadāsa denies that rebirth is central to Buddhist doctrine.[41] His reason for reinterpreting the notion of rebirth metaphorically is that this belief, presented in the Theravāda interpretative tradition, contradicts the doctrine of *anatta*, which teachs that there is no self.[42] Other scholars do not agree with him. Nakamura understands the Buddha to teach: "The connection of cause and effect between persons in the present life and persons in the past lives was not a physical one between different individuals, but rather a moral one".[43] Harvey notes: "Past karma also offers perhaps the only religiously satisfactory explanation of the suffering of people who have done nothing to deserve it in this life".[44] King states:

> Karma as a rule has also carried the connotation of fatefulness, an irrevocable, unhappy destiny riveted upon a man by his likewise irrevocable deeds in past lives. To such a deserved fate one can only passively yield. There is a considerable measure of truth in this conception, judged by the historical influence of the belief in karma,

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[39]Gosling (1975), 222.
[40]Gosling (1975), 222-223.
[41]Jackson (1988), 136.
[42]Jackson (1988), 138.
[43]Nakamura (1986), 45.
[44]Harvey (1990), 44.

> though contemporary Buddhist leaders are trying hard to change this fatalistic connotation by an emphasis upon the individual's power to change his present, and consequently future, karma through resolute deeds in the here and now.
>
> In any case, karma (literally "deed") stands for the power of the deliberately willed action to produce future mental and physical results in keeping with its original quality. We may called karma the ethical subdivision of the dharmic causal order; it is the *ethical* life of man structured according to the cause-effect uniformity of the *natural* order of the outer world.[45]

Though the law of *kamma* is quite straight forward, it cannot be regarded as rigid and mechanical, but as the flexible, fluid and dynamic out working of the fruits of actions.[46] No one can understand exactly how it works. Those who live a moral life will not always be reborn in a good place. Similarly, those who live an immoral life are not immediately reborn in a bad place. The Buddha discussed this reality with Ānanda his disciple:

> There are these four (types of) persons, Ānanda, existing in the world. What four? Some individual here, Ānanda, is one who makes onslaught on creatures, takes what has not been given, wrongly enjoys pleasure of the senses, is a liar, of slanderous speech, of harsh speech, a gossip, covetous, malevolent in mind, and of false view. At the breaking up of the body after dying he arises in the sorrowful ways, a bad bourn, the Downfall, Niraya Hell.
>
> Some individual here, Ānanda, is one who makes onslaught on creatures...(*as above*)... is of false view. At the breaking up of the body after dying he arises in a good bourn, a heaven world.
>
> But some individual here, Ānanda, refrains from onslaught on creatures, refrains from taking what has not been given, refrains from wrong enjoyment of the sense-pleasures, refrains from lying, refrains from slanderous speech, refrains from harsh speech, refrains from gossip, is not covetous, not malevolent in mind, and is of right view. At the breaking up of the body after dying he arises in a good bourn, a heaven world.
>
> Some individual here, Ānanda, refrains from onslaught on creatures ...(*as above*)...is of right view. At the breaking up of the body after dying he arises in the sorrowful ways, a bad bourn, the Downfall, Niraya Hell.
>
> *Majjhima Nikāya* III. 209-210.[47]

The Buddha gave the reason for the inconsistent outcomes by explaining that the individual who conducts his life immorally is reborn in a good place because he has done a lovely deed earlier or later; or at the time of dying a right view was adopted and firmly held by him. It is also possible for him to undergo unpleasant events in another mode or another cycle of rebirths.[48] From this explanation we can see that those who face injustice in this world will receive justice in the future according to the law of *kamma*. Erik Cohen points out that according to the law of *kamma*, "demerits of previous acts are irrevocable; like sums on a balance-sheet they can be counterbalanced

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[45]King (1963), 42.
[46]Harvey (1990), 41.
[47]*Majjhima Nikāya*: *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. III (1959), 257.
[48]*Majjhima Nikāya*: *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. III (1959), 261-262.

by meritorious acts, but cannot be erased; there is no concept of forgiveness in the Christian sense, since there is nobody in the universe who could forgive".[49] It is true that there is no concept of forgiveness in Buddhism, but there exists a concept of transferring of merits, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. A person who makes a merit can decide to whom his merit goes. The recipients may not ask for it, but they receive it anyhow.

Merit making plays an important role in Buddhism especially when it relates to *kamma*. Buddhists who are not able to attain *nibbāna* normally act in auspicious ways to secure a better rebirth. When I worked in a church in Thailand between 1984-1987, I took some members to public parks or some homes to train them how to share their faith with others. Before sharing our faith, we normally started by asking a question: "What do you do to release yourself from the law of *kamma* ?". The reply we always received was "to do good deeds". Some answered "I do not know", or "to die". Never one answer was "to reach *nibbāna*". One of the auspicious acts done by most Thai males is the Buddhist initiation. In this ceremony laypeople enter the *sangha* for a while and then return to their lay life. This rite of passage is an important part of growing up for most Thai males do go through this ceremony at the age of 18. This ceremony is considered as *dāna* (the practice of giving), for in it a boy's parents or sponsors are giving their son (and in him themselves) to the monastic life, to a quest for enlightenment.[50] This example clearly shows that one person can act for another person. The practice of giving (*dāna*) has always been one of the hallmarks of Buddhist moral conduct. *Dāna* has two basic forms: *āmisadāna*–the gift of material goods such as food and clothing, usually made by lay persons–and *dhammadāna*–the gift of *dhamma* usually consisting of sermons or teachings given by monks.[51] In Buddhism, a pure motive of giving is seen as leading to a better *kammic* result. While a large gift is generally seen as more auspicious than a small one, purity of mind can also make up for the smallness of gift and a person with nothing to give can act auspiciously by simply rejoicing at another person's giving.[52] In Thailand, people normally rejoice with another person's giving by uttering *sādhu* (สาธุ) which means "it is good!". Therefore every Buddhist has a chance to gain merit no matter how poor he is.

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[49]Cohen (1991), 121.
[50]Strong (1990), 117.
[51]Strong (1990), 107.
[52]Harvey (1990), 43. See also Gombrich (1971), 226.

Another closer concept in Buddhism which relates to the idea of forgiving is *ahosi kamma* (the result of an action disappears). Gombrich explains by giving an example:

> Duṭugämuṇu killed many Tamils in war, which is *pav* [demerit], but he did it to save Buddhism, and then did so much for Buddhism (founding monasteries at Anurādhapura, etc.) that his *pin* [merit] so far outweighed his *pav* that he will stay in heaven (*divyalōkē*) till the time of Maitrī, the next Buddha, when he will be reborn as his right-hand disciple (*dakuṇat sav*, i.e. the equivalent of Säriyut for Gotama Buddha) and attain *nirvāṇa*. His *pav* will therefore never mature, there being no results (*vipākē*) of bad *karma* in heaven.[53]

In Thailand the idea of *ahosi kamma* (อโหสิกรรม) is apparent in daily life. For example a truck driver who knocks a man down by accident will go to the funeral service of the deceased and ask for *ahosi kamma* (forgiveness) from the deceased soul, and also seek *ahosi kamma* from the relatives of the deceased as well. This idea of *ahosi kamma* suggests that Buddhists entertain the idea of forgiveness in their system of belief. An offender has to depend on the mercy of the offended. Buddhists do not take God into consideration because they do not see that God is offended.

The universe, according to general Indian belief, goes through cycles of evolution and devolution; though our physical environment is periodically destroyed it comes into being once more.[54] Most Buddhists will not seek divine intervention, but they will consult their Horoscopes to see what will happen to them in the future. They would like to be prepared to face their misfortunes. It is a general belief that if a person's *kamma* is good he will be born at a moment when the stars are favourable.[55] In many important occasions Thai Buddhists will consult the astrologer to find suitable days, times to open new stores, moving houses, changing jobs, or getting married. Gombrich cites the comment of Dr. Obeyesekere as follows: "...that here again we encounter the anxiety caused by the doctrine of *karma*. The more conscious a man is of the doctrine, the more anxious he becomes to know what the future holds in store for him; the more Buddhism, the more astrology".[56] However, on the personal level, Gombrich detected a contrary tendency among the villagers in Sri Lanka: those who put most trust in Buddhism were least inclined to astrology.[57] According to canonical tradition, the Buddha himself condemned astrology, palmistry, and all similar practices. The Buddha did not deny their possible validity, but declared them a distraction from

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[53]Gombrich (1971), 215-216.
[54]Gombrich (1971), 144.
[55]Gombrich (1971), 146.
[56]Gombrich (1971), 148.
[57]Gombrich (1971), 148.

the road to salvation.[58] In Thailand, some monks practice astrology and give advice to laypersons. Several Buddhist movements in Thailand condemn this practice by monks and suggest that it is one cause of the decline of Buddhism.

The law of *kamma* is also used to explain why the lowness and excellence are to be seen among human beings. The condition of each human being derives from their previous actions. Here is the summary of the explanation of one *sutta*:

> It is said that acts of hatred and violence tend to lead to rebirth in hell, acts bound up with delusion and confusion tend to lead to rebirth as an animal, and acts of greed tend to lead to rebirth as a ghost. A person's actions mould their consciousness, making them into a certain kind of person, so that when they die their outer form tends to correspond to the type of nature that has been developed. If bad actions are not serious enough to lead to a lower rebirth, they affect the nature of human rebirth: stinginess leads to being poor, injuring beings leads to frequent illnesses, and anger leads to being ugly–an extension of the process whereby an angry person gradually develops ugly features during their present life (*M.* III. 203-6).[59]

This explanation shows that good and bad rebirths are not, therefore, seen as "rewards" and "punishments", but as simply the natural results of certain kinds of action. Some kinds of action even have a strong effect upon the appearance of a person in the present life. In this regard a Christian may consider bad action as sin. However, action is not the real cause of *kammic* reaction. The seed of *kammic* result is, in fact, the will or intention (*cetanā*) behind an act: "Monks, I say that determinate thought is action. When one determines, one acts by deed, word or thought".[60] Actions with intention only will generate *kammic* result; unintentional actions would not be counted. Not every action in daily life will be recorded in *kammic* data; only deliberate actions will be recorded.

Therefore we can refer *kamma* to action. Bad action is called black *kamma* (กรรมดำ); good action is called white *kamma* (กรรมขาว). There are other two kinds of *kamma*: both black and white *kamma* (กรรมทั้งดำทั้งขาว), a *kamma* that combines both bad and good actions; neither black nor white *kamma* (กรรมไม่ดำไม่ขาว), a *kamma* that serves to neutralise the other kinds.[61] The fourth kind of *kamma* is the realisation of not-self (*anattā*) and emptiness (*suññatā*), so that the "self" is done away with.[62] It will wipe out three other kinds of *kamma*. Therefore, for Buddhism, to end the force of *kamma* is not achieved through moral action. Each individual has to determine to end three kinds of *kamma* above. Erik Cohen points out that because of the belief of

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[58]Gombrich (1971), 149.
[59]Harvey (1990), 39.
[60]*Anguttara-Nikaµya : The Book of Gradual Sayings,* Vol. III (1934), 294.
[61]See Rājavaramuni (1988), 21-22 and Buddhadāsa (1988), 41-42.
[62]Buddhadāsa (1988), 42.

the law of *kamma*, Thai Buddhists do not have the concept of fundamental evil or hence of "sin" in the Judeo-Christian sense.[63] Moreover, there exists no concept of "guilt", again in the Judeo-Christian sense; demerit (*bap* บาป) leads to pragmatically bad consequences and hence should be avoided, but the individual is ultimately responsible only to himself and hence neither "sinful" nor "guilty" when acting demeritoriously.[64] Some missionaries have realised that Thai is a "shame" rather than a "guilt" culture.[65] Thai Buddhists seem to think that if they do something wrong they can correct it in the next life, but if they do something which contradicts community norms they will not be accepted by the group. Therefore they tend to follow the way the group normally act. In the light of this it can be said that whatever actions are acceptable in a society they are good *kamma*. Gombrich states "Karma is typically social".[66] However, for Buddhism, the aspirant for salvation is being directed to withdraw from society.[67] It is clear, then, that the Law of *Kamma* is not part of Buddhist soteriology. In fact it is an obstacle or an unimportant aspect which *nibbānic* seekers can by-pass. According to Buddhist tradition, human beings can attain *nibbāna* whatever their station in life. *Nibbāna* can erase all the effects of their past bad *kamma*. In other word, *nibbāna* functions like God's forgiveness.

The law of *kamma* retains its status in canonical Buddhism only in relation to past lives rather than as a predictor of the results of present conduct.[68] Gombrich observes: "the de-emphasis of future lives weakens the theodicy: true, evil deeds will be punished, as the karma doctrine says, but this is not psychologically important if we will not be around to see it".[69] Therefore the concept of *kamma* in Buddhism is just an expression of ideas which explain human existence at present. It is not the goal of Buddhism. Good *kamma* cannot bring about *nibbāna*, despite the fact that those who had reached *arahantship* maintained that they had recalled their past life while meditating.

Gombrich sees that the law of *kamma* is used by Buddhists as a means of social control.[70] The doctrine of *kamma* provides the principle for reward and punishment. The law of *kamma* is retained in Buddhism as a moral cause. Some *kamma* bear fruit in the same life in which they are committed, others in the succeeding

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[63]Cohen (1991), 121.
[64]Cohen (1991), 121.
[65]Cohen (1991), 124.
[66]Gombrich (1975), 215.
[67]Gombrich (1975), 215.
[68]Gombrich (1975), 217.
[69]Gombrich (1975), 217.
[70]Gombrich (1975), 218.

ones, and others in future lives more remote.[71] If a person murders a man, he will be definitely killed by an authority or by an accident either in this life or in future lives. Regulatory institutions, such as the existing legal system, and indeed the pantheon, are indirectly legitimized as agents of the reward and punishment; even if punishment appears unmerited, it may result from bad acts in a former life.[72] Hence the law of *kamma* is also the moral law for human beings who live in the same society to follow.

From all the above evidence it is clear that Buddhism adopts the idea of *kamma* from Hinduism for practical reasons rather than theoretical ones. One main element of this idea was modified to accommodate the significant belief of Buddhism that there is no soul. In Buddhism, the connection between one life and the next has to be found in another form; craving (*taṇhā*) causes the birth of the new individual who was to inherit the *kamma* of the former one.[73] For Buddhism the law of *kamma* is the highest law that controls human existence. However, Buddhists believe that human beings can break the bond of *kamma* by reaching the state of *nibbāna*. *Kamma* is used to explain many events that cannot be proved by explicit reasons. It is equated with natural law, and could perhaps be understood as replacing the concept of God as creator and judge of the world. To prove or disprove the reality of the law of *kamma* is as difficult as to prove the existence of God. The Buddha adopted the concept of *kamma*, but did not pay attention to the existence of God. *Kamma* is not part of Buddhist soteriological system, but it is there to help people see what will happen to them if they do not reach *nibbāna* and at the same time to provide them hope when their present attempts fail. Significantly, if the law of *kamma* does not exist, there is no need for Buddhists to seek *nibbāna*. Most Buddhists hold on to the idea of *kamma* rather than withdraw from it. Rājavaramuni sees that *kamma* affects four levels of human nature: 1) mind which will make each individual happy or sad; 2) behaviour which will make each person the way he or she behaves in certain circumstances; 3) life which derives from outside forces, circumstances, other human beings and society, that leads to the present outcome of each individual; 4) and social behaviour which is directly affected by the overall actions of all people who live in that particular society.[74] The law of *kamma* provides the fundamental moral teaching for Thai society: those who do good deeds will receive reward; those who do evil deeds will receive bad results in turn. This principle is similar to the teaching of sages in the Hebrew Bible, especially in Proverbs which teaches that he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward (Prov. 11:18); he

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[71]Nakamura (1986),44.
[72]Gombrich (1975), 218.
[73]Nakamura (1986), 45.
[74]Rājavaramuni (1988), 82-83.

who sows wickedness reaps trouble (Prov. 22:8). However, Qohelet, a sage himself, does not agree with this kind of teaching because his experience reveals the contrary.

Chapter Ten

The Concepts of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*

After his enlightenment, the Buddha preached his first sermon to the five ascetics who had followed him. In this sermon he discussed the problem of suffering, and showed the way to resolve this problem. This sermon is known among Buddhists as the Four Noble Truths.

The first Noble Truth indicates that suffering is a universal fact. The Buddha saw that every earthly existence is indeed sorrowful: decay, disease, death, union with the unpleasing, separation from the pleasing. The wish which cannot be fulfilled is sorrowful.

The second Noble Truth states that the cause of suffering is desire. The Buddha preached that the recurring desire which is associated with enjoyment or seeking after pleasure is the cause of sorrow. The ceaseless striving for pleasures and sensations only arouses more desire.

The third Noble Truth declares that it is possible to stop sorrow, and to acquire happiness, by abandoning, renouncing, and escaping from desire. This state of cessation from desire is called *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*).

The fourth Noble Truth shows the way that leads to *nibbāna*. It is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration, right views, right thought.

This sermon is based on the three fundamental characteristics of all existence as understood by the Buddha. These three characteristics are *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anatta* (no self). Humphreys summarises :

> All forms of life, said the Buddha, can be shown to have three characteristics in common; impermanence, suffering, and an absence of permanent soul which separates each from the other forms of life. He pointed out how no 'thing' is the same at this moment as it was one moment ago. Even the 'everlasting hills' are slowly being worn away, and every particle of the human body, even the hardest, is replaced every seven years. There is no finality or never-ending change. As Shelley says: 'Naught may endure but Mutability.' Like all other natural processes anicca is cyclic. It is an ever-rolling Wheel with four spokes–Birth, Growth, Decay and Death. Every form that comes into being goes through each stage in turn, and nought can stay the hand of time. The law of change applies to all compounded things, including man-made objects, ideas and institutions. From a granite cathedral to a china vase, from a code of laws to an empire, all things rise to their zenith, and then, however slowly, decay towards the inevitable end.[1]

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[1] Humphreys (1990), 80-81.

This principle was earlier recognised by Henry Yule who visited Ava in 1855, for he informed his reader that "ANITYA, DUKHA, ANATTA, Transience, Pain, and Unreality (so the devout Buddhist mutters as he tells his beads), these are the characters of all existence, and the only true good is exemption from these in the attainment of nirvana".[2] Almond disagrees with Yule on the translation of *anattā*, for he comments that "'Unreality' is an incorrect translation for 'anatta' or 'anatman'. It would be better translated as 'non-soul' or 'non-self'".[3] However, Yule's translation is probably more correct, for these terms seem to have several meanings. It is quite difficult to find an English equivalent. Moreover, various scholars understand these terms differently. Therefore, the meanings of these terms should be explored before making any definite conclusion.

The first term *anicca* is translated as "impermanence" or "transiency". This term describes the constant change of all things. Therefore nothing in this world can offer absolute fulfilment to those who desire pleasure. Jackson points out that "According to the doctrine of anicca, the desiring of impermanent things in the long run can only lead to the 'I' or desirer suffering the loss of those things".[4] One aim of Buddhist meditation is to achieve clarity, seeing things as they are: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without essence.[5] It is plain to see that *anicca* is a part of a system of belief that opposes eternality. It relates to *dukkha* in the sense that human beings suffer because they do not know that all things are impermanent. If they recognise that all things are impermanent, they will not become attached to them. Then they will cease to desire for life. It relates to *anattā* in the sense that if an individual recognises that he is also impermanent, he will not take everything to himself. This doctrine gives value to life, not in breath and length, but in depth, realising the transitory nature of phenomena, "and of our oneness with Noumenon compared with which this life is of the substance of a dream".[6] Human anxiety is often rooted in the impermanence of life, but if a person can penetrate the nature of impermanence, he will peacefully accept that sickness or decay or death are a part of natural law. This belief is expressed in one of the readings that Buddhists chant at funerals when the body is laid down:

> Impermanent, alas, are all conditioned things,
> Their nature is to arise and pass.
> They come into existence, then they cease;

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[2]Yule (1968), 236.
[3]Almond (1988), 159, n. 164.
[4]Jackson (1988), 159.
[5]Gombrich (1988), 64.
[6]Humphreys (1990), 84.

> Their allaying, their calming, is peace.
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> *Saṃyutta Nikaya,* II, 192.[7]

The second term *dukkha* normally refers to potentially painful or frustrating experiences. It is simply the opposite of well-being. It is quite difficult to find an English equivalent, but many translate this term as "suffering". Gombrich finds that "frustration" would be philosophically accurate, but would sound too petty.[8] He thinks that "unhappiness" is inadequate because it is only mental, not physical. The idea of *dukkha* covers the wide range of human experiences.[9] It includes the ordinary meaning of suffering such as misery, distress, despair, agony, suffering of body and mind. It also means change, emptiness, imperfection, conflict.[10]

Collins gives a more detailed analysis of this term as follows:

> Two things lead one to a correct understanding. First, *dukkha* is most precisely translated as 'frustration' or 'unsatisfactoriness'–and this is a judgement passed not as a description of life but as a reflective conclusion drawn from soteriologically oriented premises. Second, the suffering, or 'unsatisfactoriness' is not purely personal, but includes the experience of all beings, as a characterisation of samsaric life as a whole, when considered in contrast to the state of *nibbana.* There are, we are told, three kinds of *dukkha.* 'Ordinary suffering' is everyday physical and mental pain, contrasted with ordinary happiness, or indifferent feelings. 'Suffering through change' is the unsatisfactoriness alleged to be inherent in the fact that all feelings, all mental and physical states, are impermanent and subject to change. This sort of suffering can be registered phenomenologically as 'ordinary suffering' through distress at the cessation of pleasant feeling; but more generally, it is not so much an actual state of distress as a proper seriousness in the face of impermanence and death: 'When it is seen that that which is impermanent is unsatisfactory, there can be no occurrence of blissful feeling.' It was [sic] the reflection, arrived at in meditative solitude, that 'indeed this world is in distress: one is born, grows old, dies and is reborn. No-one knows the escape from this suffering, this growing old and dying', which led the previous Buddha Vispassi to leave his life of ease as a prince and seek release.
>
> The third form of *dukkha* is 'suffering through (the fact of) conditioned existence'. In part, this is connected with the previous idea of suffering through change and impermanence. The Buddha declares: 'When I said "whatever is experienced is (a case of) suffering", it was spoken in connexion with the nature of constructed things to decay, waste away, fade away and cease, and change.' Generally, the idea that what is 'constructed' or 'conditioned' is in itself a form of suffering depends on the whole of Buddhist doctrine, on the disjunction between what is causally conditioned and the unconditioned *nibbana,* and on the system of value-judgements which is entailed by it. Thus *dukkha* in Buddhist thought represents not a life-denying pessimism, but (part of) a specific soteriological project.[11]

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[7]Cited in *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 41.
[8]Gombrich (1971), 69.
[9]Gombrich (1971), 69.
[10]De Silva (1987), 127.
[11]Collins (1982), 191-192.

Collins' analysis points out that there are at least three levels of *dukkha*. Different persons who experience the first and the second form of *dukkha* may feel pain in quite a different degree. However, the last one is the fact that every human being experiences in a more or less equal degree. The concept of *dukkha* in Buddhism is the core of a human's problem as sin is the core of a human's problem in Christianity. Nobody can be exempt from the law of *dukkha* in Buddhism. Likewise, no-one can be exempt from the calamity of sin in Christianity. In the same way all those who are born into the world cannot avoid the reality of futility of life in Ecclesiastes.

There are several factors in human suffering: *taṇhā* or craving; *kilesa* or defilement; *avijjā* or ignorance; *kamma* or action. The first factor craving "is the vitalistic, mentalistic core or dynamic centre of each unit of sentient existence".[12] Every living being exists in this world because of craving from previous lives. The final goal of Buddhism is *nibbāna*, dissipation or extinction from this world. But by craving the sentient life holds on to the frantic will-to-be. Though the doctrine of *anicca* teaches that everything in this world is changing, the person who has *taṇhā* will return to the cycle of suffering, despite the fact that he will be in a new form of life. Any man who does not look for *nibbāna* will be overcome by his own cravings as the *Dhammapada* warns:

> If a man watches not for NIRVANA, his cravings grow like a creeper and he jumps from death to death like a monkey in the forest from one tree without fruit to another.
>
> And when his cravings overcome him, his sorrows increase more and more, like the entangling creeper called *birana*.[13]

In Buddhism, three types of craving can be identified: craving for sensual pleasure, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence.[14] The first type refers to temporary desire in the present existence. It is the desire to seek happiness in this world. The second type is the cause of rebirth. It is the inner hope for a better life in a future existence. It is the drive for eternal life after death.[15] The third, though it sounds similar to the idea of *nibbāna*, is not. In fact it is the drive to get rid of unpleasant situations, things and people.[16] It is the denial of reality and the rejection of one's whole present life situation. Some Thai Buddhists think that one way to be freed from the law of *kamma* is to die. However, according to the teaching of Buddhism, death is not the end of human suffering. Even a person who decides to

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[12]King (1963), 112.
[13]*The Dhammapada* verses 334-335.
[14]Harvey (1990), 53.
[15]Harvey (1990), 53.
[16]Harvey (1990), 53.

end his suffering in this present life by committing suicide will suffer again in the new form of existence.

In Thai language, the words *kilesa* and *taṇhā* are always used together. The idea of *taṇhā* is related to human desire in general. The idea of *kilesa* is related to the negative characteristics of human mentality. Traditionally ten *kilesa* are enumerated: (1) *lobha*–greed, (2) *dosa*–hatred, (3) *moha*–delusion, (4) *mana*–conceit, (5) *ditthi*–false views, (6) *vicikiccha*–scepticism and doubt, (7) *thina*–mental torpor, (8) *uddhacca*–mental restlessness, (9) *ahirika*–shamelessness, (10) *anottappa*–lack of a conscience or moral dread.[17] If any person is controlled by these ill emotions, he will be overwhelmed by his suffering. The condition which permits *kilesa* to arise and pollute the mind is the absence of mindfulness or *sati*.[18] Though *kilesa* gives rise to a mentally disturbing condition, Buddhadasa suggests that we do not need to dig out or extricate it from our mind because it has no essential character.[19] In his system *kilesa* is not to be removed, but rather prevented from developing by remaining mindful and so not allowing its necessary preconditions to arise. This teaching implies that the human mind is fundamentally pure and undefiled. However, the mind can be aroused by external stimuli. It can be defiled by taints that come from without. Therefore, it is plain to see that for Buddhism, mind (*citta*) is the centre of a person. His condition is dependent on the state of his mind. If his mind is under control and is not disturbed by *kilesa*, he is free from conflict and there is true peace.

Avijjā or ignorance represents an uncultivated mind. Any person who remains in suffering does so because he lacks knowledge of the real truth about sentient existence and drives himself forward into any new form of existence rather than face dissolution.[20] Though wounded and frustrated in this form of existence, many Thai Buddhists try to gain merit as much as possible with the unquenchable hope that another existence will bring enduring happiness. Harvey uses a formula to demonstrate how spiritual ignorance contributes toward several conditions that lead to *dukkha*:

> (1) spiritual ignorance → (2) constructing activities → (3) (discriminative) consciousness → (4) mind-and-body → (5) the six sense-base → (6) sensory stimulation → (7) feeling → (8) craving → (9) grasping → (10) existence → (11) birth → (12) ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair, 'Thus is the origin of this whole mass of *dukkha*'.[21]

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[17]Jackson (1988), 181-182, n.19.
[18]Jackson (1988), 162.
[19]Jackson (1988), 163.
[20]King (1963), 112.
[21]Harvey (1990), 55. See also Fox (1973), 125.

The ignorant person is not the person who does not have enough information, but the one who holds on to a misperception of reality, which can only be destroyed by direct meditative insight. Therefore spiritual ignorance, as seen in Buddhism, is the basic root of suffering.

Kamma is also an important factor in the process of *dukkha*. *Kamma* is the power of a voluntary thought, word, physical action, or dominant attitude to produce a fitting consequence in the life of its author or possessor.[22] Therefore it is possible to say that a person suffers because he decides to continue living in the cycle of suffering. The present situations of a person are determined by his actions in his previous life. His actions in this present life will determine the situations of his next life. The Buddhist scriptures are full of stories of the fitting transformation of beings into new forms that embody their dominant attitudes in past existences or result from their past deeds.[23] However, there is a mixture of bad deeds and good deeds in each individual. Likewise, there is a mixture of sadness and happiness in life through the experiences of each individual. This evidence suggests that there is no guarantee that the good deeds done in this life by a person will definitely provide happiness in his future life because each individual has an infinite number of past existences. The fruits of one cycle of existence may not show in the next immediate cycle of existence. Davis explains this phenomenon by an illustration:

> *Karma* is like a computer with a memory bank which registers every good and bad thought and deed. It is capable of giving a *karmite* [sic] read-out of the present state of any given person. The problem is that at any moment a reading from the memory banks can 'kick in' bringing a *karmic* updating to the present read-out. It has also an in-built "buffer memory" capacity, so that the present print-out may have not actually caught up with the memory bank. This action would transform one's circumstances immediately. So theoretically we could be experiencing a prosperous happy life, but this is only because the *karmic* computer reading has not provided the cummulative register of merit versus demerit and any moment the state of affairs could change. What a terrifying state in which to exist.[24]

Theoretically, the law of *kamma* is quite certain, but practically, it is uncertain. The "cause and effect" theory can be used to explain some kind of situations, putting the entire responsibility on past existence. But it cannot provide any protection for the present life. Therefore many Buddhists in Thailand seek their security through fortune tellers who tell them in advance what will happen to them in the near future. These fortune tellers will also provide them with some magic or some kind of protections to reverse their misfortune. The Buddha clearly recognised

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[22]King (1963), 113.
[23]King (1963), 113.
[24]Davis (1993), 71.

the uncertainty side of the law of *kamma*, so he suggested the way that leads to the cessation of human suffering. His strategy was not to interfere with the law of *kamma*, but to bring an end to this law by stopping the process of rebirth like switching off the computer system. Bad deeds from the past have no effect if a person is out of the cycle of rebirth. However, the switching off of the *kammic* system is a long process. It is not an instant remedy, because whoever wants to stop the process of rebirth needs to practise a long discipline of meditation and of selfless good work.[25]

Another important aspect of the law of *kamma* is that each individual takes full responsibility for himself. Though a person can put the blame for his present condition on an unknown reason from a past existence, it is still his past "self". King finds that this basic belief is very important: "*This sense of sole personal responsibility for one's own fate is essential to the Buddhist view of man's predicament*".[26] Therefore Buddhism has emphasised that each individual has to help himself to be free from the cycle of rebirth. Buddhists do not believe in a saviour. Nobody can help others to be free from the law of *kamma*. Likewise the doctrine of *anattā* becomes very important for Buddhists' salvation. Moreover, the concept of rebirth found in Buddhism actually has its root from Hinduism. Therefore it is important to understand some concepts about life from Hinduism.

The doctrine of *anattā* is a basic concept of Buddhism which relates to the doctrine of the *ātman* (or *attā*) in Hinduism. Humphrey explains that in the Buddha's day, this *ātman* doctrine was of two kinds, the original and the degraded forms.[27] The Brahmanic philosophy proclaims that life is one, and at the heart of the universe there is the one Absolute Truth-Reality, Brahman.[28] Though being absolute, Brahman from time to time produces a visible world of individual forms and beings. These forms and beings become visible and are called *māyā* which is less real than Brahman, even though an expression of it.[29] Because each *māyā* is a part of Brahman, these individual forms long to return to their quiescent state in the undifferentiated Absolute. This belief also implies that in each man and all that lives there is a divine element, for the finite can never return to the Infinite unless it is in essence one with Infinity.[30] With the reservation that any brief generalisation in

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[25]Streeter (1932), 193.
[26]King (1963), 114.
[27]Humphrey (1990), 85.
[28]King (1963), 116.
[29]King (1963), 116.
[30]Humphrey (1990), 85.

regard to Indian thought in the time of the Buddha is open to criticism, Streeter summarises three doctrines as characteristic of the typically Indian outlook regarding human existence:

> (1) The Real is the unchanging. All that appertains to the sphere of the phenomenal, all things material, all the ordinary activities of daily life, belong to the border-line between the existent and the non-existent; they are essentially *maya*, or illusion.
>
> (2) History, the field of fact and change, belongs to the realm of *maya*. And it is an illusion everlastingly recurrent. The Universe in which we live is only one in an infinite series of universes; worlds wax and wane, are born and perish, in endlessly recurrent cycles. There is no beginning and no end–simply change without purpose, and movement without goal.
>
> (3) Through this eternal cycle runs the law of "Karma", the law by which, in an endless series of reincarnations, the soul reaps what it has sown in one life in the form either of misery or of blessing in a future rebirth.[31]

The concept of *anicca* in Buddhism is very close to the concept of *māyā* in Hinduism. Though all things in this world keep changing, they, in fact, keep repeating their cycles. However, the goal of Buddhism is different from the goal of Hinduism. For Hinduism, the ultimate goal is that after passing through many forms of life and through spiritual discipline and insight, the *ātman* will realise that it is of the essence of Brahman leading to the regaining of primordial unity. On the contrary, the ultimate goal of Buddhism is not to unite with Brahman, because in its southern form it refuses to posit any primordial substance or reality, such as Brahman. Buddhism strongly denies the existence of soul in the Hindu sense, giving the new doctrine of *anattā*.[32] For the Buddha argued that anything subject to change, anything autonomous and totally controllable by its own wishes, anything subject to the disharmony of suffering, could not be such a perfect true self.[33] The final goal of Buddhism is *nibbāna* a blissful cessation of individualised existence.[34] Yule probably equates the doctrine of *anattā* with the doctrine of *māyā*, so he translates *anattā* as "unreality".[35] Though "unreality" is the nuance of both *anattā* and *māyā*, each goes in different directions. Though *māyā* is unreal, it is part of the utterly Real. The main focus of the doctrine of *anattā* is "not self". The basic concept of *anattā* is that there is no "real me" in human existence. However, this doctrine is not easy to comprehend as shown in the time of Buddha. He did not give any answer to the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta, who had asked him whether self does exist:

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[31]Streeter (1932), 44-45.
[32]King (1963), 117.
[33]Harvey (1990), 51.
[34]King (1963), 117.
[35]Yule (1968), 236.

> Then Vacchagotta the Wanderer went to visit the Exalted One... and said:-
> 'Now, master Gotama, is there a self?'
> At these words the Exalted One was silent.
> 'How, then, master Gotama, is there not a self?'
> For a second time also the Exalted One was silent
> Then Vacchagotta the Wanderer rose from his seat and went away.
> Now not long after the departure of the Wanderer, the venerable Ananda said to the Exalted One:-
> 'How is it, lord, that the Exalted One gave no answer to the question of the Wanderer Vacchagotta?'
> 'If, Ananda, when asked by the Wanderer: "Is there a self?" I had replied to him: "There is a self," then, Ananda, that would be siding with the recluses and brahmins who are eternalists.
> But if, Ananda, when asked: "Is there not a self?" I had replied that it does not exist, that, Ananda, would be siding with those recluses and brahmins who are annihilationists.
> Again, Ananda, when asked by the Wanderer: "Is there a self?" had I replied that there is, would my reply be in accordance with the knowledge that all things are impermanent:
> 'Surely not, lord.'
> Again, Ananda, when asked by Vacchagtta the Wanderer: "Is there not a self?" had I replied that there is not, it would havc been more bewilderment for the bewildered Vacchagotta. For he would have said: "Formerly indeed I had a self, but now I have not one any more."'
>
> The Salayatana Book iv, 40, XLIV,X, § 10[36]

From this story, it is plain that there were at least two groups of brahmins: eternalists and annihilationists. Buddha did not want to follow either extreme. The doctrine of *anattā* and the doctrine of *anicca* depend on each other. Hence, Buddha preached:

> Body, brethren, is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is suffering. What is suffering, that is without the self. What is without the self, that is not mine, I am not that, not of me is this self. Thus should one view it by perfect insight as it really is. For the one who thus sees it as it really is by perfect insight, his heart turns away, is released from it by not grasping at the Asavas.
>
> The Khandha Book iii, 43, XXII, § 45[37]

The Buddha did not accept the concept of eternal existence, on the other hand he did not deny empirical existence. He said that "all things are non-self". He denied the belief which teaches that there is a permanent, constantly abiding self or soul-like entity.[38]

The doctrine of *anattā* also shows that each individual is not the owner of his body for he cannot fully control it as the Buddha explained to his five disciples at Banaras, in the Deer Park:

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[36]*Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* Vol. IV, 281-282.
[37]*Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* Vol. III, 39.
[38]*The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 48.

> 'Body, brethren, is not the Self. If body, brethren, were the Self, then body would not be involved in sickness, and one could say of body: "Thus let my body be. Thus let my body not be." But, brethren, inasmuch as body is not Self, that is why body is involved in sickness, and one cannot say of body: "thus let my body be; thus let my body not be."...
>
> Now what think ye, brethren. Is body permanent or impermanent?'
>
> 'Impermanent, lord.'
>
> 'And what is impermanent, is that weal or woe?'
>
> 'Woe, lord.'
>
> 'Then what is impermanent, woeful, unstable by nature, is it fitting to regard it thus: "this is mine; I am this; this is the Self of me?"'
>
> 'Surely not, lord.'
>
> 'So also is it with feeling, perception, the activities and consciousness. Therefore, brethren, every body whatever, be it past, future or pesent, be it inward or outward, gross or subtle, low or high, far or near, –every body should be thus regarded, as it really is, by right insight,–"this is not mine; this am not I; this is not the Self of me."
>
> The Khandha Book iii, 68, XXII, § 59 (7).[39]

Some may argue that "I can move the body around, I can think, I can feel". If the body and mind were really self we should be able to exercise ultimate control over them.[40] The idea that each person is not able to control his own self leads Nicola Tannenbaum to argue that *anattā* can be translated as "lack of control".[41] She also criticises anthropologists who only translate *anattā* as "no self" when they are studying Theravada Buddhism, because she reckons that this sole translation will limit our understanding of Buddhism.[42] Her analysis of this meaning is primarily based on sermons given by Shan (an ethnic minority in the north of Thailand) monks in two Shan villages in Maehongson Province in Thailand.[43]

The teaching of the Buddha about the inability to control was a response to the Brahmanical thought of world-renouncing ascetics who thought that universal power could be attained through knowledge of, and control over, the self as a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosmic force of the universe.[44] The concept of *anattā* was an attempt to deny that such control existed. However, this idea of *anattā* as lack of control is not well recognised by general Buddhists in Thailand. Many Thai Buddhists may know the term, but they hardly know its meaning. The same phenomenon is true among Burmese Buddhists whom Spiro had met in a village of upper Burma:

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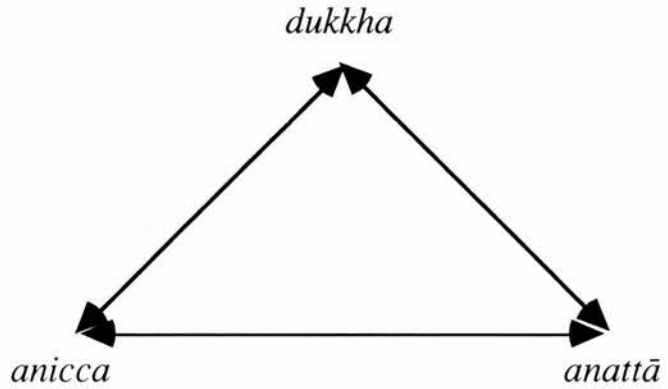
[39]*Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* Vol. III, 59-60.
[40]*The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 50.
[41]Tannenbaum (1993), 1.
[42]Tannenbaum (1993), 2.
[43]Tannenbaum (1993), 3 and 20.
[44]Collins (1982), 97.

> Burmans, as we shall see, not only reject the concept of nonself, but many of them, including the most knowledgeable Buddhists in Yeigyi, do not even know its meaning. In responding to my query, almost all of them confused the doctrine of nonself with the doctrine of impermanence, as the following (typical) responses indicate: "Nothing is permanent." "There is no permanent material entity." "Everything is extinguished." Here is the comment of the most sophisticated Buddhist in the village: "Everything changes from moment to moment. As a human being I do not wish to die, to be blind, to get old, etc., but I must. I have no power to prevent them. *This is anatta.*"[45]

The evidence given by Spiro also demonstrates that the doctrine of *anicca* and the doctrine of *anattā* are inter-related. The last comment is most interesting because it gives the meaning of *anattā* as lack of power or lack of control as suggested by Tannenbaum.[46]

Though lack of control is one of the nuances of *anattā*, it may not imply absolute lack of control. Buddhism teaches that each individual can work out his own way to reach the state of *nibbāna* through meditation or detachment. There is a popular Thai saying that people always use: *ton pen tī bung haeng ton* (ตนเป็นที่พึ่งแห่งตน) which means each person is his own helper. It seems that the concept of *anattā* teaches that since we do not have definite control over our bodies, we should detach ourselves from this world. By detachment one will be able to control one's direction toward *nibbāna*.

From all the evidence mentioned above, it seems possible to conclude that the three concepts, *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* are connected to each other like a triangle. *Dukkha* is at the peak of the triangle, while *anicca* and *anattā* are at the bottom of the triangle as the following picture illustrates:



We can also conclude that the doctrine of *anicca* and *anattā* are the two basic concepts that explain the origin of suffering. Both impermanence and the inability to

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[45]Spiro (1971), 84-85.
[46]Tannenbaum (1993), 17.

control cause suffering. If one accepts that everything is always changing and no-one has power over one's own "self", cessation of suffering is attainable. These three religious terms are also found in colloquial Thai. The term *anicca* is normally used by a comforter in the situation where a friend loses something or someone that is dear to him. The Thai word *dukh* (ทุกข์) which derives from the term *dukkha* means suffering in general and carries the same nuance as *dukkha* Therefore the concept of *dukkha* is well conceived by Thai people. The term *anattā* is seldom used by common people. It may be used by some educated people to advise someone who has suffered some kind of pain.

The nuance of the word *hebel* in the book of Ecclesiastes covers the meanings of these three terms. However, the committee that translated the Bible into Thai in 1971 decided to translate the word *hebel* as *anicca.* In fact the meaning of the word *dukkha* is closer to *hebel* than *anicca.* The sense of lack of control in *anattā* can also be seen in *hebel.*

Chapter Eleven

Meditation in Buddhism

As mentioned in the previous chapter, every Buddhist must work out his own salvation by his own efforts. And meditation is the one and only way recognized by Buddhism for the attainment of its highest spiritual goals.[1] We may define meditation in Buddhistic terms as a devout reflection on life by cultivating wisdom (*paññā*) which sees things "as they really are".[2] Meditation can be practised by any Buddhist, both monk and layman. Besides being the only way to reach the state of *nibbāna*, meditation also serves "to promote spiritual development, to diminish the impact of suffering, to calm the mind and to reveal the true facts of existence".[3]

Though meditation is not practised solely by monks and nuns, those who practise it need a teacher to guide their meditation because it is a process of learning skills which cannot be properly conveyed by standardized written teachings.[4] Harvey illustrates:

> Learning meditation is a skill akin to learning to play a musical instrument: it is learning how to 'tune' and 'play' the mind, and regular, patient practice is the means to this. Progress will not occur if one is lax, but it cannot be forced. For this reason, meditation practice is also like gardening: one cannot force plants to grow, but one can assiduously provide them with the right conditions, so that they develop naturally. For meditation, the 'right conditions' are the appropriate application of mind and of the specific technique being used.[5]

From the illustration given by Harvey, we can see that there are several basic criteria for successful meditation. The right conditions need to be provided. Those who want to practise meditation need to learn specific techniques to control the mind. Despite the fact that each Buddhist can work out his salvation through meditation, the success depends partly on the teacher. If the teacher provides an adequate technique, the disciple will be able to accomplish the goal quickly. Interestingly, however, most Buddhists are not in a hurry to reach the state of *nibbāna*. As a Burmese friend of King declares:

> everyone knows that the unavoidable strait and narrow road leading to salvation is the meditational discipline. Sooner or later in one's repeated embodiments it must be embraced if rebirth is to be escaped.[6]

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[1]King (1963), 136.
[2]Harvey (1990), 244.
[3]Conze (1969), 11.
[4]Harvey (1990), 244.
[5]Harvey (1990), 244-245.
[6]King (1989), 249.

Many Buddhists try to learn meditation as much as they can even though they do not expect *nibbāna* in this life. They see that meditation is useful for their daily living, even in the secular world. In the late 1940s a movement began to revive meditation in Thailand, and by 1970 there were many hundreds of meditaion centres throughout the kingdom.[7] One prominent Buddhist movement in Thailand, the Wat Pra Thammakuay which bases its teachings and meditation techniques on the instructions of Pra Mongkhonthepmuni, has subsequently attracted a wide range of middle-class supporters and powerful establishment figures.[8] Its members dominate all the Bangkok campus Buddhist associations, except Mahidol University.[9] Almost every weekend, the members of these associations go to the Wat to practise meditation.

Conze explains that "'Meditation' is a European term which covers three different things, always clearly distinguished by Buddhists themselves, i.e., mindfulness, concentration and wisdom".[10]

To practise meditation properly, meditators need to control their thoughts by mindfulness (*sati*) because according to Buddhism the mind is the centre of human life. We can see the significance of mind from the commencement of the Dhammapada:

> What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind.
>
> If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him as the wheel of the cart follows the beast that draws the cart.
>
> *Dhammapada* vs. 1.[11]

This text suggests that the mind can manipulate our future. Therefore if we can control our mind, a favourable outcome can be expected. To overcome the contaminated mind one needs to learn the skill of practising mindfulness. Evidently, the mind doctrine is the starting, focal and culminating point of the Buddha's message. The Doctrine of the Mind teaches three things:

> to *know* the mind,–that is so near to us, and yet is so unknown;
> to *shape* the mind,–that is so unwieldy and obstinate, and yet may turn so pliant;
> to *free* the mind,–that is in bondage all over, and yet may win freedom here and now.[12]

Corresponding to this doctrine, Thera adds that Mindfulness holds the very same place within the Buddhist mind-doctrine by explaining:

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[7]De Silva (1987), 142.
[8]Gosling, (1993), 7.
[9]Gosling, (1993), 7.
[10]Conze (1969), 16.
[11]*The Dhammapada* (1973), 35.
[12]Thera (1962), 24.

> Mindfulness, then, is
>
> the unfailing master key for *knowing* the mind, and is thus the starting point;
>
> the perfect tool for *shaping* the mind, and is thus the focal point;
>
> the lofty manifestation of the achieved *freedom* of the mind, and is thus the culminating point.[13]

Harvey defines mindfulness as follows:

> Mindfulness (*sati*) is the process of bearing something in mind, be it remembered or present before the senses or mind, with clear awareness. It is defined as 'not floating away' (*Asl.*121), that is, an awareness which does not drift along the surface of things, but is a thorough observation.[14]

This awareness occurs under certain circumstances. Meditators need to remove themselves from the secular world to a solitary place to reduce physical distractions to a minimum. Moreover, the first category of mindfulness is clear reflection upon the body and the first exercise is to develop awareness of breathing, the basic nutrient of life.[15] Therefore any meditator needs to go into the forest or find a secluded place as suggested in *Majjhima Nikaya* :

> And how, monks, does a monk fare along contemplating the body in the body? Herein, monks, a monk who is forest-gone or gone to the root of a tree or gone to the empty place, sits down cross-legged, holding his back erect, arousing mindfulness in front of him. Mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Whether he is breathing in a long (breath) he comprehends, 'I am breathing in a long (breath)'; or whether he is breathing out a long (breath) he comprehends, 'I am breathing out a long (breath)'; or whether he is breathing in a short (breath) he comprehends, 'I am breathing in a short (breath)'; or whether he is breathing out a short (breath) he comprehends, 'I am breathing out a short (breath)'.
>
> *Majjhima Nikaya*, I, 56.[16]

This text suggests that not only is the location important, but also the position of the body. In fact there are several postures that the meditator can use: lying, pacing, or standing, but the recommended posture is to sit with cross-locked legs, hands idle in the lap, spine erect and eyes half closed.[17] Harvey emphasises that this position is a stable one which can be used as a good basis for stilling the mind.[18] He even adds:

> The body itself remains still, with the extremities folded in, just as the attention is being centred. The general effects of meditation are a gradual increase in calm and awareness. A person becomes more patient, better able to deal with the ups and downs of life, clearer headed and more energetic. He becomes both more open in his dealings with others, and more self-confident and able to stand his own ground.

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[13]Thera (1962), 24.
[14]Harvey (1990), 246.
[15]*The Essential Teachings of Buddhism*, 28.
[16]Cited in *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism*, 28.
[17]King (1963), 158.
[18]Harvey (1990), 245.

> These effects are sometimes quite well established after about nine months of practice, starting with five minutes a day and progressing to about forty minutes a day. The long-term effects go deeper, and are indicated below.[19]

From *Majjhima Nikaya*, I, 56, we can also see that breathing, the basic nutrient of life, is used as an object of meditation. In fact there are forty meditation objects in Buddhism but breathing is the most fundamental and universal; it is the meditation object that the Buddha used in his own spiritual quest.[20] Fox lists these forty objects for contemplation as follows:

Ten Devices

1. Earth Device: a circle made of clay
2. Water Device: a bowl of clear water
3. Fire Device: a flame
4. Air Device: something, such as the top of a tree, that can be seen to move in the breeze
5. Blue Device: some blue object such as a piece of cloth
6. Yellow Device: something yellow
7. Red Device: something red
8. White Device: something white
9. Light Device: a beam of light shining through a hole
10. Space Device: a limited space viewed through some aperture

Ten Impurities

1. A swollen corpse
2. A discolored, blue-green corpse
3. A corpse full of pus
4. A fissured corpse
5. A corpse torn by animals
6. A dismembered corpse
7. A scattered corpse
8. A blood-spattered corpse
9. A worm-infested corpse
10. A skeleton

Ten Recollections

Recollection of:

1. the Buddha's virtues
2. the merits of the *dharma*
3. the *bhikkhu sangha*
4. the merits of observing the precepts
5. the merits of liberty
6. the equality of gods and men in respect of the virtues
7. the inevitability of death
8. the body
9. breath
10. the attributes of mental tranquillity

The Four Sublime States

1. Universal benevolence
2. Compassion
3. The happiness of others
4. Equanimity

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[19]Harvey (1990), 245.

[20]*The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 28.

The Four Immaterial States
1. Infinite space
2. Infinite Consciousness
3. Nothingness
4. Neither perception nor non-perception

The two remaining subjects for meditation are:
1. The notion of the loathsomeness of food
2. The analysis of the four primary elements[21]

Moreover, these objects are "classified according to types of persons–or perhaps also to the stage or mood a person is in at a particular time–and in terms of the levels of meditative achievement to which each subject can lead when properly meditated upon".[22] Therefore it is quite important for any meditator to select an appropriate object for meditation to suit their personality type at any given time. However, the precise choice of a subject makes no real difference; the quality and nature of the meditation are more important.[23] These objects not only help meditators to focus their attention but also serve as the steps of achievement toward the final goal *nibbāna*. To choose the right object for meditation, it is helpful for the meditators to follow some guidelines as shown in Table 1.[24]

Table 1
Meditation Subjects

Type of Person (to whom suited)	Subject and Themes	Absorptions (Jhānas) Attainable by Respective Type of Meditation
	I	
Devotional	Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, Sīla, Benevolence, Devas	Neighborhood concentration
Intellectual	Calmness or Peace, Death	Neighborhood concentration
Passionate or sensual	Body Constituents	Neighborhood concentration
	II	
Intellectual	Repulsiveness of Food, Analysis of Four Material Elements	Neighborhood concentration
	III	
Passionate or sensual	Corpse or Cemetery Meditations	First Absorption

[21]Fox, D (1973), 160-162.
[22]King (1980), 31.
[23]King (1980), 31.
[24]King (1980), 32.

	IV	
Angry (choleric or irritable)	Illimitables (Mettā, Karuṇā, Muditā, and Upekkhā)	First Four Absorptions
Dull and unstable	Respiration	
	V	
	Kasinas	
All types	1. Earth, air, fire, water	All Absorptions
All types	2. Hole or gap, and light	All Absorptions
Angry type	3. White, yellow, red, blue	All Absorptions
	VI	
All types after they reach Fifth Absorption level	Formless (arūpa) objects, Infinity of Space, Infinity of Consciousness, Nothingness, Neither Perception nor Nonperception	Four highest (formless) Absorptions

Apart from the posture of the body and the objects for meditation, there are three preliminary conditions: virtue (*sīla*), consciousness (*samādhi*), and understanding (*paññā*). Buddhaghosa begins his great compendium of meditation theory and practice by quoting the following words of the Lord Buddha:

> When a wise man, established well in Virtue,
> Develops Consciousness and Understanding,
> Then as a bhikkhu ardent and sagacious
> He succeeds in disentangling this tangle [25]

Therefore meditators need to begin with ethical practice. They have to be ethically prepared in attitude and action for meditation by training themselves in the five precepts, i.e. to avoid killing, stealing, lying, sensuality, and intoxicants.[26] Though keeping these five precepts does not mean that one will succeed in meditation practice, "there is a consolation prize for those who do no more than cultivate virtue, or who, having cultivated virtue as a base for meditation, do not achieve the higher levels of meditative awareness: upon death they will be born in the deva-worlds and return finally to the human world in pleasant circumstances".[27] This consolation leads many laymen in Thailand to practice meditation as much as they can, despite the fact that *nibbāna* is not their goal. It seems obvious that for some, meditation is a kind of merit-

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[25]Buddhaghosa (1956), 1. Buddhaghosa repeats this quotation many times in chapter 1 of his work.
[26]King (1980), 35.
[27]King (1980), 35.

making as well. Another consolation is to know how far the meditator has progressed. To this end, Buddhists speak about stages of attainment and in the most common arrangement of these there are four:

> 1. The Steam-Entrant (Pali: *Sotāpanna*): The person who has reached this stage is said to have already broken the first three of ten "fetters" which are said to bind us to our state of ignorance. These fetters are belief in a self, doubt about the Buddha or his teaching, and reliance on good works or ceremonies to deliver us from our existential problems.
> 2. The Once-Returner (Pali: *Sakadāgāmin*): Here is a person who has greatly reduced the power of two more fetters–lust and hate–and is so far advanced toward perfection that he may expect to be reborn into this world only once more.
> 3. The Non-Returner (Pali: *Anāgāmin*): He is now entirely liberated from the first five fetters and will not be reborn in our world. If he is born again, it will be in a special "Brahma world" and not in any mere terrestrial or heavenly realm.
> 4. The Worthy (Skt.: *Arhat;* Pali: *Arahat*): This person has destroyed the remaining five fetters (desire for life in the realm of form, desire for life in the formless realm, pride, restlessness, and ignorance). The *Arhat* is, thus, one who has completed the course set for him by Buddhism and has attained *Nirvāna*.[28]

Harvey states that "Theravāda meditation builds on a foundation of moral virtue to use right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration as mental 'tools' to cultivate the mind and thus develop wisdom".[29] These three factors belong to the Noble Eightfold Path which is the middle way of practice that leads to the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*). The Path has eight factors: (1) right view or understanding, (2) right directed thought, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration.[30] These factors can be grouped in a threefold division: virtue (*sīla*), consciousness (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).[31] The first division (*sīla*) contains factors 3-5; the second division (*samādhi*) contains factors 6-8; the final division (*paññā*) contains factors 1-2.[32]

The chief objectives of the second preliminary condition *samādhi* (Calm Meditation) are to overcome defilements within us that are less overt than observable behaviour because they operate at the level of thought and feeling, and to attain tranquillity and insight.[33] Buddhism believes that our mind consists of two disparate parts–a depth which is calm and quiet, and a surface which is disturbed. The surface layer is in perpetual agitation and turmoil.[34] In order to conquer this turmoil it is important for meditators to withdraw themselves from all outside distractions and enter

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[28]Fox, D. (1973), 154.
[29]Harvey (1990), 246.
[30]Harvey (1990), 68.
[31]Harvey (1990), 68. See also Thera (1962), 29.
[32]Harvey (1990), 68.
[33]Fox, D. (1973), 159.
[34]Conze (1956), 17.

into the central part of the mind. To overcome these distractions they do not need to ignore them but to focus their attention on particular objects. These objects are used to train the mind to focus on only one thing. A mind of single intent is capable of doing more effectively whatever it does.[35] The attention, then, will dwell not only on the various characteristics of the object, but also on its relationship to the observer.[36]

Among the three factors of *samādhi*, right mindfulness (in a more particular sense than mindfulness as considered earlier) is the main part of meditation; the Buddha highly recommended it to his disciples. On one occasion Sāriputta, a Brahmin, came to visit the Buddha and said to him:

> "A superman, a superman," is the saying, lord. Pray, lord, how far is one a superman?
>
> It is by emancipation of mind, Sāriputta, that I call a man "superman." Without emancipation of mind there is no superman, I declare. And how, Sāriputta, is one's mind emancipated?
>
> Herein, Sāriputta, a monk abides in body contemplating body (as transient), ardent, composed and mindful, by restraining that dejection in the world that arises from coveting. As he so abides in body contemplating body, his mind is purified, emancipated, by freedom from the āsavas. So also with regard to feelings... mind... mind-states... his mind is purified, emancipated by freedom from the āsavas.
>
> Thus, Sāriputta, is one's mind emancipated. Indeed, Sāriputta, it is by emancipation of mind that I call a man "superman." Without this emancipation of mind there is no superman, I declare.
>
> *Sanyutta-Nikāya* Text V, 156, XLVII, III, II, i.[37]

Right Mindfulness is the tool that helps the meditators liberate their mind from defilements. Therefore meditators need to observe this factor of their life thoroughly. Thera explains:

> Right Mindfulness is fourfold with regard to its *objects.* It is directed (1) towards the body, (2) the feelings, (3) the state of mind, i.e. the general condition of consciousness at a given moment, (4) mental contents, i.e. the definite contents, or objects of consciousness at that given moment.
>
> These are the four 'Contemplations' (*anupassanā*), forming the main division of the discourse. They are sometimes also called the four Satipaṭṭhānas, in the sense of being the basic objects of Mindfulness, or Sati.[38]

Meditators really need to spend time to concentrate on each area of their lives. There is no short cut for them. If they do not discipline themselves, they will surely give up before they complete the whole process. To see any progress they need perseverance.

As mentioned above not everyone will succeed in practising meditation because there are at least five hindrances which obstruct further progress. These hindrances are sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and fear of

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[35]Conze (1956), 19.
[36]Thera (1962), 25.
[37]*Sanyutta-Nikāya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* Vol. V, 137-138.
[38]Thera (1962), 28.

commitment.[39] Meditators need to overcome these hindrances gradually, otherwise they will not be able to progress further. If they are able to suspend these hindrances they will gradually build up the five factors of *jhāna*, which have been gradually developing all along, counteracting the hindrances. These factors are applied thought, examination, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness of mind.[40] At this state meditators will be able to stay contentedly with the meditation object. Then if meditators keep on working they will come to the fourth *jhāna*, which is a state of profound stillness and peace, in which the mind rests with unshakeable one-pointedness and equanimity, and breathing has calmed to the point of stopping.[41] Those who continue to practise this Calm Meditation can attain a state known as the cessation of cognition and feeling, or simply the attainment of cessation.[42] Only someone who is already a Non-returner or *arahant* can attain this state which is a sort of unconscious meeting with *nibbāna*.[43] Fox calls this state Attainment Concentration which contains eight or nine sub-stages according to variant traditions.[44] These substages are often referred to as absorptions, which the adept learns with much practice and can sustain for long periods. Because of its arduousness, Fox observes that there is a tendency to bypass Attainment Concentration and move directly from Access Concentration to the kind of meditation which is called *vipassanā* or Insight Meditation, the latter being after all, the real goal of the entire process.[45] Harvey also indicates the limitation of Calm Meditation:

> Calm meditation alone cannot lead to *Nibbāna*, for while it can temporarily suspend, and thus weaken, attachment, hatred and delusion, it cannot destroy them; only Insight combined with Calm can do this.[46]

However Cousins points out that *samatha* is used as a synonym for *nibbāna* in two contexts.[47] It is obvious that these two kinds of meditation are related to each other. When we focus our attention on breathing we are developing *samatha* (Calm Meditation) but when we emphasise awareness of breathing we are inclining towards *vipassana* (Insight Meditation).[48] However, the distinction between these two became a matter of preeminence in Thailand as a well known contemporary Thai meditation teacher commented:

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[39]Harvey (1990), 249.
[40]Harvey (1990), 249-250.
[41]Harvey (1990), 250-251.
[42]Harvey (1990), 252.
[43]Harvey (1990), 252.
[44]Fox, D. (1973), 163.
[45]Fox, D. (1973), 163-164.
[46]Harvey (1990), 253.
[47]Cousins (1984), 57.
[48]*The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 28.

> These days many people cling to the words. They call their practice *vispassanā*. *Samatha* is looked down on. Or they call their practice *samatha*. It is essential to do *samatha* before *vipassanā*, they say.[49]

The terms *samatha* and *vipassanā* seem to be problematic. Cousins looks into some of the Pali Canon and finds arrangements that divide the path into three divisions: the Sīlakkhandha divides it into *sīla, samādhi* and *paññā* and the Kassapa-sīhanāda-sutta divides into *sīla-sampadā, citta-sampadā* and *paññā-sampadā*.[50] He also sees these path structures in the Nikāya literature: *sīla>samatha>vipassanā*.[51] Therefore it is possible to identify *samatha* with *samādhi* and *citta*; but *vipassanā* with *paññā*. King points out that *vipassanā* is often tied together with *samādhi* (*samatha-vipassanā*) because Insight Meditation can be produced only by Calm Concentration of the mind.[52] In the same way Harvey sees that Calm Meditation makes the mind stable and strong, so it can be a more adequate instrument for knowledge and insight.[53]

After his investigation into several parts of the Pali Canon, Cousins finds some points of contrast between *samatha* and *vipassanā*. For example, he finds that the development of *samatha* leads to developing *citta*, which leads to the abandoning of desire (*rāga*) by means of liberation of the heart. In contrast, development of *vipassanā* leads to developing wisdom and then to the abandoning of ignorance and liberation of understanding.[54] He also finds that several passages contrast the one who obtains peace of mind with the one who obtains insight into Dhamma through higher wisdom.[55] Moreover, he quotes the interpretation of Ānanda about the four ways to attain arahantship: insight is preceded by peace or peace is preceded by insight or peace and insight are yoked as a pair or when a bhikkhu is gripped by Dhamma excitement.[56] Despite the difference, both *samatha* and *vipassanā* are instruments that lead to arahantship as Cousins graphically expresses with the picture below:[57]

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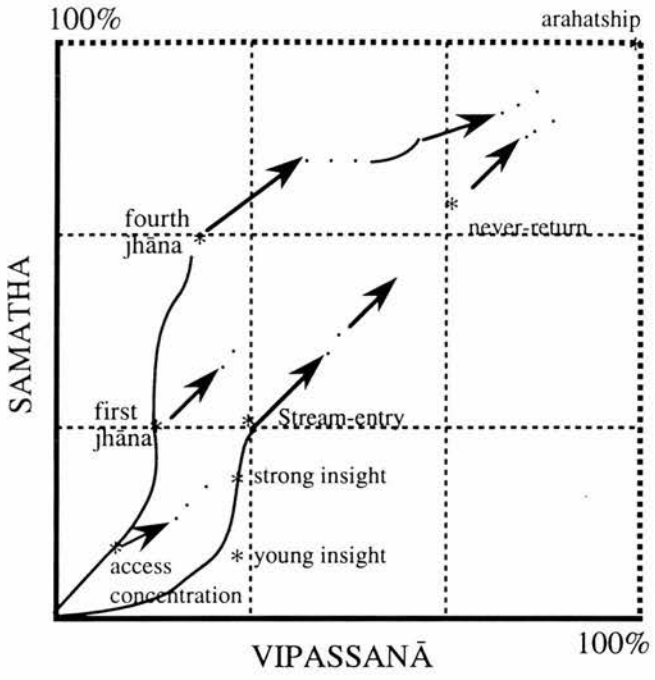
[49]Cousins (1984), 56 cited from J. Kornfield, *Living Buddhist Masters,* Unity Press, (Santa Cruz 1977), 41-42.
[50]Cousins (1984), 57.
[51]Cousins (1984), 58.
[52]King (1980), 90.
[53]Harvey (1990), 253.
[54]Cousins (1984), 59.
[55]Cousins (1984), 59.
[56]Cousins (1984), 59-60.
[57]Cousins (1984), 65.



Buddhadāsa the renowned Thai monk, following the belief of Zen, suggests:

> *Samatha-vipassanā* is one thing, not two separate things. If they were two things, we would have to do two things and that would be too slow...Both *samatha* and *vipassanā* are developed at one and the same time. That saves time–a precious commodity in this nuclear age...
>
> We can describe this as simultaneously seeing with tranquility (*samatha*), seeing an object and fixing the mind upon it, and seeing with insight (*vipassanā*), seeing the characteristics, conditions, and truth of the thing. These two kinds of seeing happen together. We can say that *samādhi* (concentration) is added to *paññā* (wisdom). *Samādhi* is the mind steadfastly focusing on the object; *paññā* is seeing what the thing is about, what characteristics its has, and what its truth is. For example, to look at and fix on a stone is *samādhi*, then to see that this stone is flowing continuously in change is *paññā*. You don't have to do it many times, you don't need to do it twice, once is enough. Watch the stone and bring concentration and wisdom together in that watching...
>
> Maybe we'll be forced to admit that it's stupid to separate morality, concentration, and wisdom from one another, then [*sic*] to practice them one at a time. There's never been any success in doing so. One can uphold morality until death, yet never have morality. It is impossible to fulfill any of the trainings when they are separated from one another...If we separate them and do only one, there's no chance of success. Therefore, do all three together, simultaneously; in this way there is success.[58]

Buddhadāsa seems very concerned about time. He is influenced by modern culture's preoccupation with success within a short time. Though he sees *samatha* and *vipassanā* as one, he sees them together but ordered in sequence; *samatha* comes before *vipassanā*. Meditators will not obtain insight if they are not able to concentrate

[58]Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1988), 118-120.

upon the object. By suggesting to his followers that they practise these two together, simultaneously, he assumes that the result of *samatha* is automatically *vipassanā*. His suggestion seems appropriate for the modern world, but it remains doubtful how meditators will keep calm and concentrate when they are under the pressure of time. And if they want to succeed in this brief life they are still subject to the values of the secular world. Those who fail in the secular world lose their self-image. But meditators should not be worried about the time taken to reach their meditative goal.

It is not easy to conclude whether Insight Meditation is on the same level with Calm Meditation, but it is easier to consider Insight Meditation as the highest level of meditation. King states:

> This third level of meditative practice is fundamentally an extension of the second level. Or better, the technique of one-pointedness of attention achieved at the second level may now be applied in a way that will lead on to the enlightenment. (For second-level concentration skill is a mere technique, not intrinsically valuable. And the absorptions experienced thereby are *not* nirvanic enlightenment.)[59]

King considers Calm Meditation to be only a technique, which cannot lead to the final goal. Petchsongkram, however, emphasises that Calm Meditation must be practiced first to quiet the heart, then train the mind to calm oneself.[60] Therefore the importance of the technique of Calm Meditation cannot be overlooked, but at the same time it should not be overestimated. In his later work King strongly emphasises:

> ...the blessed states achieved by jhānic meditation must not only serve the overall purposes of meditation, but must themselves be submitted to the specifically Buddhist "critique" of insight or vipassanā. This critique is the fully existentialized realization that even blessed states belong to the impermanence of saṃsāra and must be "risen above," no matter how high and rare they seem to be.[61]

Therefore we can say that *vipassanā* (Insight Meditation) is the most essential part of the Theravāda meditational system for attaining salvation. The basic foundation of *vipassanā* is penetrative insight into the truth of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anattā*). Those who really see this truth of life will be free from suffering as found in one of the Pali texts:

> 'All is transient.' When one sees this, he is above sorrow. This is the clear path.
> 'All is sorrow.' When one sees this, he is above sorrow. This is the clear path.
> 'All is unreal.' When one sees this, he is above sorrow. This is the clear path.
>
> *Dhammapada, vss. 277-279.*[62]

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[59]King (1963), 161.
[60]Petchsongkram (1975), 106.
[61]King (1980), 81.
[62]*Dhammapada* (1973), 75.

Insight Meditation seems to require less skill than Calm Meditation with its various stages. Therefore many laymen attempt to practise Insight Meditation without passing through Calm Meditation. However, the three themes (impermanence, suffering and non-self) must not just be believed in but must be thoroughly penetrated by reflective insight, which comes from a silent mind and whose quality depends upon the degree of collectedness, tranquillity and clarity of the mind.[63]

Meditators in this *vipassanā* stage will increasingly know–feel in themselves that their bodies are indeed only a composite of physical factors, transient in nature. They hold no view of self because they are beyond conditioning.[64] Those who really view themselves in this way are laying the basis for liberation from attachment. However, they must, by concentrated attention, keep stirring their body-consciousness into the purifying fire of detachment.[65] They should not stop at any meditative state and hold any such state to be "real" and "excellent" because it is only an instrument. They should not replace the final goal of *nibbāna* with the meditative state because they will be distressed when it comes to an end. Even those who pass beyond these states of meditative success should not think "Tranquil am I, at peace am I, beyond grasping am I". Those who declare this success, indeed, do not reach *nibbāna* because they misconstrue the beneficial path as *nibbāna*. The reason is that even this last claim by a monk "is shown to be an (act of) attachment".[66] Finally, meditators have to come to realise that they are impermanent and essentially worthless, no matter how pleasant. Selfhood is not something to cling on to in passionate devotion but is a harmful delusion.[67]

Those who reach this high state will be able to observe things without any emotional excitement because they have a clear detached attention, Bare Attention, as it is sometimes called.[68] They are not disturbed by what they see, but experience a sense of illumination, peace, and freedom from all bonds of any sort.[69] Their judgement becomes unbiassed because they have given up reacting from a personal viewpoint. In this state meditators will experience the cessation of individuality, but there is still an awareness and ability to reflect wisely on the way things are in this sensory realm.[70] At this state the three causes of evil, *avijjā* (ignorance), *tanhā* (desire) and *upādāna*

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[63]*The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 41.
[64]Collins (1982), 120.
[65]King (1963), 161.
[66]Collins (1982), 122.
[67]King (1963), 161.
[68]King (1963), 161.
[69]King (1963), 162.
[70]Sumedho (1989), 97-98.

(attachment), are broken.[71] And in a moment meditators become *arahants* and reach *nibbāna*.

How soon each meditator reaches enlightenment, depends upon his mental preparation and the merit which he has accumulated in former lives. However, if one has completed the Eightfold Path (performed *samatha*) before beginning *vipassanā*, it will help to produce results, and he will acquire the Eightfold Wisdom also.[72]

Every Buddhist knows that meditation is the only way to reach *nibbāna*. However, there are various methods of practising it. There is no one fixed method; meditators need to depend on their teachers to guide them until they are able to be on their own. As we have seen there are two main types of Buddhist meditation: Calm Meditation and Insight Meditation. The relationship between these has varied. Sometimes Calm Meditation has been seen as a preliminary to Insight Meditation; sometimes greater weight and time has been given to Insight Meditation; sometimes they are seen as separate yet complementary; and sometimes they are seen to be harmonized and integrated together.[73] No matter what option one chooses, it is impossible to replace one type with the other. The aim of meditation is to produce the conditions that are conducive to the maturing of the mind so that a person can see things as they are. But there are many requirements for meditators to practise to reach that goal. It seems that only those who live in monasteries are able to practise deep meditation. Laymen who live in the modern world hardly succeed in practising meditation though there are more flexible and simplified forms of meditation. The simplified versions occur because of the pressure of time. How can a person concentrate if he feels the pressure of time?

In Thailand there is the opportunity for any layman to practise meditation by entering the priesthood for a short period of time. However, many people enter the priesthood just to repay their parents. They do not really care about meditation or enlightenment at all. In Thai custom it is felt that if one has a son, he brings much merit and if that son goes into the priesthood, the mother benefits. When she dies she may, by virtue of the son's ordination, "go to heaven on yellow cloth". According to this belief, it seems that Thai women have no chance to reach enlightenment at all, though meditation is for ordinary people as well. Meditation is not their normal option. Some laywomen may have become *arahants*, but it is quite rare.

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[71]Petchsongkram (1975), 115.
[72]Petchsongkram (1975), 119-120.
[73]Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions (1992), 65.

Chapter Twelve

Arahant: Buddhist Sainthood

In the previous chapter, we examined Buddhist meditation, and saw that not everyone will attain *nibbāna* in this life. However, the meditator who is able to attain enlightenment during the course of a lifetime will become an *arahant*. An *arahant* lives out the fated span of his physical life; its end is called *parinibbāna*.[1] After enlightenment an *arahant* continues to live and work in the world and inspire others, because when he is dead he has no influence on the world.[2] Though remaining in the world, the *arahant* is neither attached to the world nor repelled by it. The *arahant* is free of attachment and repulsion as one of the *suttas* indicates:

> Ah, happy saints, the Arahants! In them no craving's seen.
> The 'I' conceit is rooted up: delusion's net is burst.
> Lust-free they have attained; translucent is the heart of them.
> These god-like beings drug-immune, unspotted in the world,
> Knowing the fivefold mass, they roam the seven domains of good.
> Worthy of praise and worthy they–sons of the Wake true-born,
> The wearers of the sevenfold gem, in the threefold training trained–
>
> These mighty heros follow on, exempt from fear and dread:
> Lord of tenfold potency, great sages tranquillized:
> Best beings they in all the world; in them no craving's seen.
> They've won the knowledge of adepts. This compound is their last.
> That essence of the holy life that have they made their own.
> Unshaken by the triple modes, set free from birth to come,
> The plane of self-control they've won, victorious in the world.
> Upward or crossways or below–no lure is found in them.
> They sound aloud their lion's roar "Supreme are they that wake."
>
> *Saṃyutta-Nikāya* iii, 81, XXII, § 76.[3]

The person who becomes an *arahant* will not be under the law of *kamma*, for he knows that "destroyed is rebirth, lived is the righteous life, done is the task, for life in these conditions there is no hereafter".[4] Therefore an *arahant* no longer creates karmic results leading to rebirths. Their actions are just pure spontaneous actions without any future fruit. Though the *arahant* may experience physical pain, no mental anguish at this can arise because he does not identify with the pain as "mine", but simply sees it as a not-self passing phenomenon.[5]

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[1]Gombrich (1971), 70.
[2]Gombrich (1988), 120.
[3]*Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* (1925), Vol. III, 69-70.
[4]*Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* (1925), Vol. III, 65.
[5]Harvey (1990), 64-65.

In modern times it seems that fewer people are becoming *arahants*. However, in Thailand, there is a public holiday called *Makha Bucha* day,[6] which is observed yearly by Buddhists all over the country. This was the day when 1,250 *arahants* came to see the Buddha without prior arrangements. It signified that Buddhism had truly established its main roots on earth. This unplanned ocurrence seems to suggest that *arahants* have a special ability to know the future or have supernatural powers of hearing.[7]

The use of supernatural powers or magical powers is sometimes seen to indicate whether a person is an *arahant* or not. There is a story which appears repeatedly about Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja, a disciple whom the Buddha declared to be "foremost of lion-roarers".[8] This is the account of his flying through the air on a huge boulder.[9] In addition this story has been combined with that of his taking the sandalwood bowl; it is from his flying boulder that Piṇḍola grabs it.[10] The purpose of Piṇḍola's action is to overcome the doubt of the heretics who are convinced that there are no longer any *arahants* in the world.[11] Later, there is a record of the Buddha's reprimand of Piṇḍola for this action and his establishment of the Vinaya rule prohibiting such performances.[12] The doctrinal position is that the exercise of mystic powers is dangerous both for the monk, who may be seduced into a vain magical mastery of the world, and for laymen, because it may cause confusion in their minds and give opportunity for unbelievers to degrade the mystic powers of the recluse and equate them with the efficacy of base charms.[13] Nevertheless, the Buddha himself performed supernatural actions. Gombrich comments about the miracles performed by the Buddha:

> It is true that he performed some miracles, or rather wonders (for miracles imply the humanly impossible), and had marvellous powers; but these wonders are affected by the power of truth, the truth which it is open to any man to realize, and the powers likewise are those of any *arhat*–indeed some of the more trivial ones, such as levitation, may be attained by meditation even before the final goal of *nirvāṇa* has been reached.[14]

Strong gives a good reason for the purpose of a formal interdiction of public magical performances:

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[6]On the full moon of the Makha month.
[7]Petchsongkram (1975), 116.
[8]Strong (1979), 50, 72.
[9]Strong (1979), 50, 72.
[10]Strong (1979), 50, 72.
[11]Strong (1979), 50, 73.
[12]Strong (1979), 50, 73.
[13]Tambiah (1970), 50.
[14]Gombrich (1971), 81.

> One can only conclude that in the formal Vinaya ordinance against the performance of magical feats, we have an attempt to cover up the fact that we have reached the time when ordinary monks simply cannot perform these feats anymore. In this the Buddhists were cleverer, perhaps, but ultimately not very different from the heretic master who, while pretending to have magical powers, instructed his disciples to forcibly hold him down just as he was making as if to leap up into the air, and to say to him "Teacher, what are you doing? Do not reveal hidden powers of Arhatship to the multitude for the sake of a wooden bowl!"
>
> That the Buddhist themselves were aware of the lameness of their position is reflected in a number of stories in which they try to reinforce the rationale for the interdiction of supernatural displays.[15]

Therefore in modern times, Buddhists do not use supernatural powers to prove the authenticity of *arahantship*.

Swearer points out that to give the term *arahant* to those who have supernatural powers or who practise austerities is not part of the most prevalent formulas found in the *Sutta* and *Vinaya Piṭakas*.[16] Ergardt summarises the *arahant*-formulas in the *Majjhima-Nikāya* into four formulas as follows[17]:

> Formula A:
>
> Destroyed is birth, brought to a close is the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such or such.
>
> Formula B:
>
> (He), abiding alone, aloof, diligent, ardent, self-resolute, not long afterwards, by his own super-knowledge, having precisely here-now realised that matchless culmination of the Brahma-faring for the sake of which young men of family rightly go forth from home into homelessness, abided in it.
>
> Formula C:
>
> Canker-waned, who has lived the life, done what was to be done, laid down the burden, attained his own goal, whose fetters of becoming are utterly worn away, who is freed by perfect profound knowledge.
>
> Formula D:
>
> Unshakable is freedom for me, this is the last birth, there is not now again-becoming.

The word *arahant* means "worthy", i.e. worthy of great respect,[18] worthy of worship; "the perfect saint".[19] In pre-Buddhist India the god Agni, kings, and priests were called *arahants*, because they occupied distinguished positions and were worthy to receive gifts and respect.[20] Compared with Christianity, which sees Jesus as God-

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[15]Strong (1979), 50, 73-74.
[16]Swearer (1987), 403.
[17]Ergardt (1977), 3-4. See also Katz (1982), 18.
[18]Harvey (1990), 64.
[19]Tambiah (1984), 11.
[20]Pachow, (1981), 45.

become-man, Buddhists see the *arahant* as man-become-*Dhamma*.[21] Communicating with Brahmins, the Buddha called the *arahant* the true Brahmin.[22] In its most typical usage in Theravāda Buddhism, however, the term *arahant* signifies persons who have reached the goal of enlightenment or *nibbāna*.[23] In addition, when viewed in the light of the hope of the coming Maitreya Buddha, the *arahant* is a lesser personage, who is inferior to the Buddha of the past and Maitreya.[24] After attaining *arahantship, arahants* have right views in the third and last sense, of "seeing things as they really are".[25] Collins points out that the *arahant* "sees what is to be seen, but has no conceits about what is seen, what is not seen, what is to be seen, and the seer".[26]

In the Pali literature the *arahant* is the perfected human, one who has completed everything there is to do, a finished product, a Buddha. However, in Mahāyāna Sanskrit and Tibetan literatures, the *arhat*[27] is described as selfish, one who is interested only in his own salvation and not in the sufferings of others, one who is arrogant and conceited.[28] Therefore the Mahāyāna prefers to call the perfected one a *bodhisattva*. Katz does not agree with this general distinction, for he argues that the *arhat*-talk in the Sanskrit cannot be seen as referring to *arahant*-talk in the Pali.[29]

The *arahants* are not only placed at the top but minutely differentiated from one another according to their merits. An apt example is "the jewel discourse" (*Ratanasuttam*) of the *Khuddakapātha,* a Theravāda canonical text.[30] The jewel, we are told, is two fold–that "with consciousness and without consciousness". Human beings belong to the first kind. The jewel discourse places human beings in several categories as Tambiah summarises:

> Human beings are twofold, consisting of the woman (*itthi*) and the man (*purisa*). And man is accounted foremost "because the woman jewel performs service for the man jewel." The man jewel in turn divides into the house-dwelling (*agārika*) and homeless (*anagārika*) types, and the homeless is accounted foremost because "although a wheel turning monarch is the foremost of the house-living jewels, nevertheless by his paying homage...to the homeless jewel, and by his waiting on him and reverencing him he eventually reaches heavenly and human excellence till in the end he reaches the excellence of extinction."
>
> The homeless jewel divides into the ordinary man (*puthujjana*) and the noble one (*ariya*), and then later again into the initiate who is in need of further instruction (*sekkha*) and the adept who does not (*asekha*, i.e. the *arahant*). An adept

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[21]Harvey (1990), 28.
[22]Harvey (1990), 29.
[23]Swearer (1987), 403.
[24]Tambiah (1970), 48.
[25]Collins (1982), 92.
[26]Collins (1982), 142.
[27]Sanskrit form of "*arahant*".
[28]Katz (1982), xvi.
[29]Katz (1982), xvii.
[30]Tambiah (1984), 11.

> is also twofold as the "bare-insight-worker" and the "one whose vehicle is quiet." The latter also differentiates into one who has reached "the disciple's perfection" and possesses pure insight and one who has not. Among the perfected disciples, the "hermit enlightened one" (*paccekabuddha*) is accounted superior, but it is "the fully enlightened Buddha" (*sammāsambuddha*) who is accounted the foremost. "Thus no jewel is ever the equal of a Perfect One in any way at all."[31]

Another text, the *Majjhima Nikāya*, attributes to the Buddha a discourse in which he gives a descending scale according to the levels of achievement along the path of salvation and corresponding rebirth chances of several categories of monks:

> Thus, monks, is *dhamma* well taught by me, made manifest, opened up, made known, stripped of its swathings. Because *dhamma* has been well taught by me thus, made manifest, opened up, made known, stripped of its swathings, those monks who are perfected ones, the cankers destroyed, who have lived the life, done what was to be done, laid down the burden, attained their own goal, the fetter of becoming utterly destroyed, and who are freed by perfect profound knowledge–the track of these cannot be discerned.
>
> Thus, monks is *dhamma* well taught by me..., those monks in whom the five fetters binding the lower (shore) are got rid of–all these are of spontaneous uprising, they are attainers of utter nibbāna there, not liable to return from that world.
>
> Thus, monks is *dhamma* well taught by me..., those monks in whom the three fetters are got rid of, in whom attachment, aversion and confusion are reduced, all these are once-returners who, having come back to this world once, will make an end of anguish.
>
> Thus, monks is *dhamma* well taught by me..., those monks in whom the three fetters are got rid of, all these are stream-attainers who, not liable to the Downfall, are assured, bound for awakening.
>
> Thus, monks is *dhamma* well taught by me..., all those monks who are striving for *dhamma*, striving for faith are bound for awakening.
>
> Thus, monks is *dhamma* well taught by me..., all those who have enough faith in me, enough affection, are bound for heaven."
>
> *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 141-142.[32]

From the list above, there are six levels of success. The top five levels are accomplished by monks. The laymen are only able to accomplish the lower level. Their reward is to be born in heaven.[33] The highest level is for the monks who are perfected ones and therefore *arahants*. They are freed by perfect profound knowledge (*samma-d-aññā*). This knowledge makes an *arahant* an *arahant*.[34] But one cannot know the course of the *arahant*.

How, then, can we know whether monks really attain profound knowledge. The Lord Buddha gives some guidelines:

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[31]Tambiah (1984), 12.

[32]*Majjhima Nikaya: The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings* (1954), Vol. I, 181-182.

[33]Horner explains in the footnote of the English translation: Not literally, but " 'as though,' *viya,* in heaven. Some say 'assured.' ".

[34]Katz (1982) points out that *aññā* is closest to *paññā* in its usage, but is generally distinguished from *paññā* in that it is used in the restricted sense of that knowledge or intuition that brings about the fruition (*phala*) of *arahattā*. pp. 19-20.

> Monks, a monk here declares profound knowledge, saying: 'Destroyed is birth, brought to a close the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such or so.' Monks, the words of this monk are to be neither rejoiced in nor protested against. Without (your) rejoicing or protesting, the question might be asked: "Your reverence, these four modes of statement have been rightly pointed out by that Lord who knows and sees, perfected one, fully Self-Awakened One. What four? That which when seen is spoken of as seen, that which when heard is spoken as heard, that which when sensed is spoken of as sensed, that which when cognised is spoken as cognised...But knowing what, seeing what in respect of these four modes of statement can your reverence say that his mind is freed from the cankers with no grasping (remaining)?' Monks, the explanation of the monk in whom the cankers are destroyed, who has lived the life, done what was to be done, laid down the burden, attained his own welfare, in whom the fetters of becoming are utterly destroyed and who is freed by right profound knowledge, would be in accordance with *dhamma* were he to say: 'I, your reverences, not feeling attracted to things seen... heard... sensed... cognised, not feeling repelled by them, independent, not infatuated, freed, released, dwell with a mind that is unconfined. So, your reverences, as I know thus, see thus in respect of these four modes of statement, I can say that my mind is freed from the cankers with no grasping (remaining).' Monks, that monk's words should be rejoiced in and approved of by the monks, saying: 'It is good.' When they have rejoiced in and approved of his words, saying, 'It is good,' a further question might be asked...
>
> *Majjhima-Nikāya* III, 29-30.[35]

This discourse continues with more questions to be asked by the committee of monks to test whether the monk who claims to be an *arahant* is really an *arahant*. Horner summarises these questions as follows:

> Sta. 112 sets forth six ways in which a monk's claim to be an arahant can be scrutinised by other monks: they may ask about things he has seen, heard, sensed or cognised; about the five groups of grasping; about the six elements; about the six sense-fields; and about this consciousness-informed body and the phenomena external to it. In answer to each group of questions the monk who claims arahantship for himself relates the process by which he reached this height. It is of course the usual process, found for example in the *Cūḷahatthapadopamasutta,* the *Kandarakasutta* and elsewhere, and could hardly be otherwise for the fruits of the Way are only for the man or woman who closely follows the Way, "the one sole Way for the purification of beings" (*M.* i. 55), and there is very little latitude.[36]

We can see that not all monks who claim to be *arahants* will be accepted by the community of monks. They need to be examined by the other monks, presumably *arahants* themselves. These questions seem to be ones of objective criteria, but this method has its shortcomings, as a clever monk may be able to sham the answers in this interrogation.[37] For it seems that in order to have sets of answers to these questions, any monk may memorise the answers. Thus, Katz suggests that "We are left, then, with only one foolproof method: namely, mind-reading (*cetasā ceto paricca*) by a monk proficient in the meditations (*jhāna*), supernormal powers (*iddhi*) and higher

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[35]*Majjhima Nikaya: The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings* (1959), Vol. III, 81-82.
[36]*Majjhima Nikaya: The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings* (1959), Vol. III, xiv-xv.
[37]Katz (1982), 26.

knowledges (*abhiññā*)".[38] However, it is not easy to find a monk able to exercise such *abhiññā* to test another monk's claim as an *arahant*, since the number of *arahants* has been decreasing.[39]

Another difficulty many people find when they try to identify who the real *arahant* is, derives from the dual nature of *arahants* according to Theravāda tradition: fully human beings yet qualitatively different from other men. Bond explains "Since he shares a common humanity, the arahant stands as a paradigm of the religious life; however, because he has transcended the ordinary human plane through his moral and spiritual perfection, the arahant can only be venerated, not imitated, by most Buddhists".[40] It seems clear that after becoming an *arahant*, his physical appearance does not change. Also to attain *arahantship* is a personal experience of a particular individual which others can hardly imitate.

Another way to view the quality of an *arahant* is to see a basic dichotomy expressed in terms of a number of pairs of opposing but linked concepts. Examples of these pairs are:

saṃsāra/nibbāna
dukkha/nirodha
lokiya/lokuttara
avijjā/paññā

Each pair of concepts represents the Theravāda view of (1) ordinary reality and ultimate reality, and (2) the human predicament and liberation or salvation.[41] The *arahants* belong to the ultimate reality realm and they are liberated from the human predicament. Therefore we can see that the *arahant* is the opposite of an ordinary person, a *puthujjana* who is characterised by ignorance, and transmigrates in the saṃsāric, *lokiya* realm.[42]

In fact those who become *arahants* originally begin on the gradual path as ordinary ignorant householders as one of the *suttas* shows:

> Formerly, your reverences, when I was a householder, I was ignorant. The Tathāgata or a disciple of the Tathāgata taught me *dhamma*. When I had heard that *dhamma* I gained faith in the Tathāgata; being possessed of that faith I had gained in him, I reflected thus: "The household life is confined and dusty, going forth is in the open; it is not easy for one who lives in a house to fare the Brahma-faring wholly fulfilled, wholly pure, polished like a conch-shell. Suppose now that I, having cut off my hair and beard, having put on saffron robes, should go forth from home into homelessness?" So I, your reverences, after a time, getting rid of my circle of

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[38]Katz (1982), 26.
[39]Katz (1982), 26.
[40]Bond (1988), 141.
[41]Bond (1988), 141.
[42]Bond (1988), 143.

> relations, whether small or great, having cut off my hair and beard, having put on saffron robes, went forth from home into homelessness...
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> *Majjhima-Nikāya* III, 33.[43]

The process of transformation is quite long, but the first crucial point is the break from the world. This renunciation seems to suggest that laypersons cannot achieve *arahantship*. However we can find scattered instances in the texts proclaiming the attainment of *arahantship* by some laymen, but these clearly represent exceptional cases.[44]

The final step of the development to become an *arahant* is the attainment of wisdom. At this final step there are various methods to gain *arahantship*. For example, *Samyutta-Nikāya* I.191 describes how the five hundred disciples become *arahants:*

> If indeed, lord, the Exalted One have naught wherefore he blameth me, in deed or word, is there naught in these five hunderd brethren wherefore the Exalted One blames them, in deed or word?
>
> There is naught, Sāriputta, for which I blame these five hundred brethren, in deed of word. Of these brethren, sixty have threefold lore, sixty have sixfold supernormal knowledge, sixty are emancipated in both ways, and the others are emancipated by insight [alone].[45]

The sixfold supernormal knowledge (*abhiññās*) represent powers more or less closely related to the goal and intention of *arahantship*. These six supernormal knowledges are: (1) *iddhi-vidhā* or supernormal or magical powers; (2) *dibba-sota,* the divine ear or clairaudience; (3) *ceto-pariya-ñāṇa,* or mind-reading; (4) *dibba-cakkhu,* the divine eye or clairvoyance; (5) *pubbe-nivāsānussati,* or remembering former existences; and (6) *āsvakkhaya,* the overcoming of the *āsavā* (the deep-seated moral defilements).[46]

The ability to do miraculous deeds is traditionally present among Indian holy men. Horner observes that these miraculous powers constitute a central feature of the pre-Buddhist and non-Buddhist conception of an *arahant* or holy man in India.[47] The divine ear is the power to hear any sounds in the heavens or on earth.[48] Mind-reading enables the *arahant* to penetrate and discern the minds of other people, to tell what mental state a person has.[49] The three remaining *abhiññās* compose also an

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[43]*Majjhima Nikaya: The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings* (1959), Vol. III, 85.
[44]Bond (1988), 144.
[45]*Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* (1917), Vol. I, 243.
[46]Katz (1982), 28-29.
[47]Horner (1936), 83.
[48]Bond (1988), 149.
[49]Bond (1988), 149.

independent group that is threefold lore (*tevijjā*).[50] In other words, *arahants* know their past, present and future.

In popular Buddhism the *arahant* has become a figure endowed with magical and apotropaic powers. The *arahant* Upagupta, who tamed Māra and converted him to Buddhism, is thought to have the power to prevent storms and floods as well as other kinds of physical violence and unwanted chaos.[51] Customarily, Buddhist festivals in northern Thailand are initiated by an offering to Upagupta in order to guarantee the success of the event.[52]

The immediate disciples of the Buddha are archetypal examples of the *arahant* ideal. According to tradition, there are two famous pupils of the Buddha who are coupled from the very beginning, and referred to as the right-hand and left-hand disciples of the Buddha. Moggallanā, the left-hand disciple, became famous for his intense immersion in meditation and for perfecting mystic powers (*iddhi*), which accrue from its practice.[53] Sāriputta, the right-hand disciple, is celebrated for his wisdom and mastery of the *abhidhamma* commentaries.[54] Though paired, it seems that wisdom is preferable for it is represented by the right-hand. Nevertheless, both stem from the same master. This significant pair suggests that there are two major vocations open to monks in institutionalized Buddhism: the vocation of books (*ganthadhura*) and the vocation of meditation (*vipassanādhura*), the concentration on "learning" (*pariyatti*) and the concentration on "practice" (*pratipatti, paṭipatti*).[55] In addition this distinction seems to suggest that there are two possible routes for monks to attain *arahantship*: practising and studying. Both directions need time and teachers to guide in the gaining of appropriate skills to pursue *arahantship*. It seems that mystic powers may be suitable for popular Buddhists who need visible conviction. On the other hand educated Buddhists may prefer rational decisions. Nevertheless, it is possible to find some educated Buddhists who prefer meditation since many university students in Thailand spend their summer vacation practising meditation in various meditation centres. This evidence also points out that it is possible for any Buddhists to attain *arahantship*. It is not limited to the elite of society. Some Buddhists may combine the two methods in their paths to *nibbāna*.

Tambiah gives an example of the Buddha's disciples who was able to combine the two dichotomies successfully:

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[50]Bond (1988), 149.
[51]Swearer (1987), 404.
[52]Swearer (1987), 404.
[53]Tambiah (1984), 16.
[54]Tambiah (1984), 16.
[55]Tambiah (1984), 16.

> Kāśyapa emerges as an exceptional monk who combined two salient values and emphases that lesser monks would find difficult. He is pictured as both a recluse who kept aloof from the congregations of monks and a watchdog of the community's disciples who remonstrated with offenders. He was a forest dweller who was elected convener of the First Council and codifier of the *Dhamma* after the Buddha's death. He is honored in the Pali tradition as the foremost among those who observed the ascetic acts of purification (*dhūtaṅga*), and it is said that he habitually vowed to observe all thirteen *dhūtaṅga* concurrently. The Buddha honored him by exchanging robes with him. He is said to have possessed the seven physical marks of a Great Man (*mahā-puruṣa*), and he has been immortalized by the mission alloted to him, of awaiting the advent of Maitreya Buddha in order to hand over the robe of Gautamma Buddha.[56]

This example suggests that the Buddha himself prefers the combination of the two methods. Prior to his enlightenment, the Buddha practised asceticism and mortification of the flesh. He found no success in that direction, so he gave up asceticism. Later on he gained the knowledge of the Middle Path which leads to insight, wisdom and *nibbāna* by rejecting both the life given to sensual pleasures, which is degrading, ignoble, and profitless, and the life given to mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and profitless.[57]

Through the teaching of the Buddha, many became *arahants* in his life time. Some people asked the Buddha whether or not an *arahant* exists after death. He asserted that when the body of the *arahant* is broken and its life gone out, "gods and men will no longer see him".[58] *Arahant* are finished when they die, and are not normally worshipped, though in ancient times their relics were venerated.[59] Nevertheless, Buddhists continue to have their saints, write their history, and immortalise a certain number of them. As we can see the *Manorathapūraṇī*, compiled in the fifth century C.E. by Buddhaghosa as a commentary on the *Aṅguttaranikāya,* contains seventy-five biographies.[60]

A contemporary Thai monk meditation teacher and the head of a famous forest hermitage in the Northeast has written a biography of a monk whom he, and many Thai both monks and laity, have acclaimed as an *arahant*. The author reports that his acclaimed teacher had once told his disciples that "there were many *arahant* who had passed away in Thailand, for example, three in the cave of Chiengdao in the northern province of Chiengmai, two in the caves near the town of Lopburi, one in the Khao Yai

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[56]Tambiah (1984), 17.
[57]Tambiah (1984), 17.
[58]Tambiah (1984), 21.
[59]Gombrich (1971), 168.
[60]Tambiah (1984), 21.

mountain in the vicinity of Nakhon Nayok in the Northeast, and another in the monastery of Thart Luang near the Northern town of Lampang".[61]

Despite the limited numbers, contemporary Thai people seem to accept the idea of the appearance of *arahants* in their midst at all times. This belief differs from the situation in Sri Lanka. Gombrich reports that the majority of monks in Sri Lanka, at least those who are traditional, believe that the "*śāsanē*" (religion) has already declined so far that it is no longer possible for men to attain *nibbāna*. This opinion was, he reports, "very prevalent among the laity".[62] In Thailand today the *arahant* remains a vital symbol of religion. It is the ultimate model for any living monk, and the more saintly the monk, the more likely it is that he will be assigned miraculous powers by his supporters.[63] Some of the forest monks in Thailand have been or are considered to be *arahants,* and are persons of near national reputation, at least among the Buddhists.[64]

Bond states that the *arahant* represents the goal of the Theravāda tradition, and his accomplishments must be duplicated by those who would achieve liberation and *nibbāna*.[65] Nevertheless, ordinary people find veneration of the *arahant* to be a more appropriate response than imitation because the *arahant* stands on the lofty plane depicted in legends. Therefore Buddhadāsa re-interprets Pali texts and suggests reforms of Buddhism in Thailand. He suggests the new meditation system called *cit-wang* which is the basis of Buddhist spiritual practice aiming at attainment of *nibbāna*.[66] This system encourages laymen, who have little free time available to practise traditional meditation system, to expect *nibbāna* in this life. For Buddhadāsa, *nibbāna* requires neither the special learning of the scholastically trained monk nor the retreatist monastic lifestyle. He maintains that *arahantship* can be attained by means of natural concentration.[67] Thus, the accomplishment of the *arahant,* according to Buddhadāsa, can be duplicated by laymen. They do not just venerate *arahants* because they too can attain *arahantship.*

Many biographies have been written to illustrate the possibility of living the *arahant* mode in modern Thai society. For example, the biography of Pra Acharn Mun who was born in Northeast Thailand in 1870 and died in 1949, is regarded by numerous pious Buddhists as an *arahant* in the classical sense.[68] At fifteen he was

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[61]Tambiah (1984), 26.
[62]Gombrich (1971), 285.
[63]Tambiah (1984), 26.
[64]Tambiah (1984), 27.
[65]Bond (1988), 162.
[66]Jackson (1988), 192.
[67]Jackson (1988), 193.
[68]Tambiah (1984), 81.

ordained as a novice and at twenty-two he was ordained as a monk.[69] Having wandered through many parts of Thailand, he found a solitary place in the Sarika Cave of the famous Khao Yai (the Great Mountains) near the Northeastern border town of Nakhon Nayok. It was in this cave that he reached the path of the nonreturner (*anāgāmī*).[70] Then he left the cave to convey to his disciples the lessons he had learned. He was able to gather increasing numbers of disciples wherever he went, teaching them and overseeing the forest-monk communities so that they were organised appropriately for the dedicated pursuit of meditation. The next phase was his trip to Chiengmai, where in a cave of the northern mountains, he made the final progress from nonreturner to fully enlightened *arahant*.[71] Later he returned to the Northeast and when he was seventy-nine he died in the town of Sakon Nakhon. After the cremation, his ashes were distributed, and those who received them enshrined and venerated them in their homes.[72]

Currently the Santi Asoke movement which has emerged to challenge the established ecclesiastical authority in the modern history of Thailand, has published the biography of one of its members Phonphichai. who was just a regular member, not well known, but was very hard working and very quiet.[73] He became famous because of his death in a road accident on 8 February 1991.[74] That day he drove a truck to deliver goods at some of the movement's vegetarian restaurants and in so doing he sacrificed his life for the movement. According to one of the recent biographies of Phonphichai, we learn that he was never in a hurry to become a monk, but his acts and his role in the community led people to respect him as if he were a human "Buddha [image]" (พระพุทธรูปองค์หนึ่ง).[75] Thus his mode of life is equal to the mode of an *arahant* according to the modern Thai standard. Though he has passed away, his spirit is still present. As a schoolteacher lamented at his funeral: "He is not dead!...He is not dead!...Phonphichai is not dead!".[76]

Another piece of evidence which indicates that Thai people in modern society still believe in the existence of *arahants* is the wearing of amulets around their necks. Tambiah remarks:

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[69]Tambiah (1984), 83.
[70]Tambiah (1984), 88.
[71]Tambiah (1984), 91.
[72]Tambiah (1984), 109.
[73]Olsen (1993), 16.
[74]Olsen (1993), 15.
[75]Olsen (1993), 17-18.
[76]Olsen (1993), 19.

> The cult of amulets is no mere "superstition" or "idolatry" of the poor or unlettered. If you confronted a prosperous man in the streets of Bangkok–well dressed in suit and tie, or imposing in military uniform–and asked him to open his shirt collar, you would see a number of amulets encased in gold, silver, or bronze hanging on his gold necklace.[77]

Most Thai people wear these amulets for protection and perhaps for well being, prosperity and deliverance from suffering. Tambiah differentiates the amulets in four classes and one of them is the contemporary set of amulets being blessed by forest-dwelling meditation masters, some of whom are acclaimed as "saints" (*arahants*).[78] However, most Thai people use these amulets in superstitious ways, so Buddhadāsa warns:

> **Whether a Buddha image and a Buddha amulet will be beneficial or harmful depends on the user or owner.**
> If the user or owner uses it foolishly, in adherence to mere rule and ritual, it will block the path to nibbāna. But if he uses it for reflection on the virtue of the Buddha, then it will promote attainment of nibbāna.
>
> **If the Buddha could come and see the great number of Buddha images of the present time, He would say, "Use such things rightly!"**
> He would call them "things" because He would not want them, and they are incompatible with the principles of Buddhism. They will simply and inconspicuously transform Buddhism into the idolatry of the pre-Buddha or pre-Buddhism era.[79]
>
> **Wearing amulets is oppositely different from wearing objects of recollection and respect.**
> The latter is fully Buddhistic, without anything foolish or absurd.[80]

Despite these warnings Thai people still believe in the magical powers behind these amulets.

From the evidence above we may conclude that though the majority of modern Thai people do not seek the Path to *arahantship*, because it is too difficult for them, most of them believe that some dedicated persons become *arahants* in this generation. There are at least three possible ways to attain *arahantship* in modern Thai society. The first way is the traditional practice of meditation by forest-monks as in the case of Acharn Mun. Not many people will follow this route because it is very difficult and it requires strong commitment. The second is the reform method of meditation called *cit-wang* proposed by Buddhadāsa. Many educated Buddhists pursue this route because it requires less commitment. They are able to keep their routine responsibility in the

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[77]Tambiah (1984), 197.
[78]Tambiah (1984), 209. The other three are amulet representations of famous and historic Buddha images, amulets that owe their fame to the reputation of famous Buddhist monks and miscellaneous amulets.
[79]Buddhadāsa (1990), 28.
[80]Buddhadāsa (1990), 30.

secular world. The third method is to live a sacrificial life like Phonphichai, the ordinary man, who became an *arahant* because of his death. The story of Phonphichai is easier for the younger generation to relate to. Though *arahantship* is not the focus of the story, his biography portrays him as a heroic figure and a model for moral ethics in modern Thailand.

In modern Thai society, there are still many examples of *arahants* to follow, but most Thai people prefer to venerate them rather than imitate them. They want these *arahants* to bless them and protect them from harm.

Chapter Thirteen

Nibbāna: The Goal of Buddhism

In the previous chapter we discussed the quality of the persons who will reach the final goal of Buddhism. This chapter will deal with the state of *nibbāna* directly. The term *nibbāna* is the Pali version of the Sanskrit *nirvāṇa*. It is the state most Buddhists look forward to achieving. The doctrine of *nibbāna* clearly affects how Buddhists live their daily lives. Pryor observes that it appears both to deny the importance of economic activity and to encourage withdrawal from this world.[1]

The Buddhist conception of *nibbāna* is unlike any other non-Buddhist conception of Ultimate Truth known in religious history before or after the Buddha. This conception is like a medicine to heal human suffering. It is the Third Noble Truth of the Four Noble Truths. It declares that there is a state of cessation of *dukkha*; utter cessation, without attachment, of craving, its renunciation, surrender, release, lack of pleasure in it.[2] This is the outcome of Buddhist salvation. It can be noted that the negative descriptions of *nibbāna* are more numerous than positive ones. Joshi adds that *nibbāna* is the extinction of desire, the destruction of greed, hate, delusion, and of the constituent factors (*skandhas*) and volitional forces (*saṃskāras*).[3] It literally means "extinction" or "quenching", being the word used for the "extinction" of a fire.[4] *Nibbāna* destroys death and is therefore called Deathlessness or Immortality (*amṛta*).[5] The positive description of *nibbāna* is "becoming cool, cooling".[6] *Nibbāna* is "the refreshment of a man who is suffering, the cooling of a man who is hot with desire, comfort, peace, serenity, bliss".[7] Those who attain *nibbāna* after they die will go beyond the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and will not return to it again. The Buddha considered rebirth misery; the peace of *nibbāna* was the only good worth having. Moreover, if it happens during life, it is frequently defined as the destruction of three defilements. As Sāriputta answers one of the wanderers: "The destruction of lust, the destruction of illusion, friend, is called Nibbāna".[8] The synonym of *nibbāna* is *arahantship* for Sāriputta defines the

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[1] Pryor (1990), 339.
[2] Harvey (1990), 61.
[3] Joshi (1979), 193.
[4] Harvey (1990), 61.
[5] Joshi (1979), 193.
[6] La Vallée Poussin (1917), 113.
[7] La Vallée Poussin (1917), 113.
[8] *Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* Vol. IV (1927), 170.

meaning of *arahantship* in the same way as he defines *nibbāna*: "The destruction of lust, friend, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of illusion,–that is called Arahantship".[9] In fact it is not easy to explain what *nibbāna* really means for there are at least four interpretations as La Vallée Poussin comments:

> Buddhist dialectic has a four-branched dilemma: Nirvāṇa is existence, or non-existence, or both existence and non-existence, or neither existence nor non-existence. We are helpless.[10]

Most Buddhists are not concerned about the meaning of *nibbāna,* but their concern is to reach it. They all understand that it is deliverance from this "unpleasant" life. Some may think that it is unreachable while some will try their best to attain it.

Despite the fact that *nibbāna* is the ideal of non-attachment to worldly goals, Theravāda Buddhism, however, has always been much more than *nibbāna*-seeking monks meditating in forests or teaching in monastery schools in villages and towns. Swearer comments:

> From its origin the religion also served to define moral virtue and the social-ethical ideals of generosity, compassion, nonviolence, righteousness, and wisdom narrated in the tales of moral exemplars such as the legendary Prince Vessantara, whose generous spirit led to extremes of self-sacrifice, or the noble Asoka, who governed his Indian kingdom with justice and righteousness. Prohibitions against killing, theft, dishonesty, and other immoral acts that developed from these sacred naratives were eventually codified and set within a typical Indian cosmology, depicting heavenly realms of reward for the virtuous and damnation for the unjust.[11]

Many political leaders in Buddhist countries have tried to integrate Buddhism into their political ideology. For example, Luang Vichitr Vadhakarn, the Thai propagator of strident nationalist-militarist ideas, advanced a conservative or neotraditionalist argument in keeping with his political slogans.[12] In his book *Phutanuphap* (1931), he affirmed the Buddha's command of miraculous powers, not only with respect to moving men's hearts by teaching his doctrine but also with respect to his ability to control natural elements.[13] He also affirmed the future coming of the Buddha to this world, and the relics and original elements of the Buddha coming together again at the end of time. Landon comments:

> This idea rests on the theory that the entering of Nirvana was threefold. The first step was accomplished when the passions entered Nirvana at enlightenment, the second was when the Buddha was eighty years of age and entered Nirvana, and the

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[9]*Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* Vol. IV (1927), 171.
[10]La Vallée Poussin (1917), 111.
[11]Swearer (1991), 630-631.
[12]Tambiah (1976), 407.
[13]Tambiah (1976), 407.

> third is to be accomplished at the final entry of the primary bodily elements of Buddha in the future.[14]

Such a concept of *nibbāna* (as this one) does not regard it as emptiness, but as a progressive power which can transform life, if we consider the bodily elements of the Buddha have life. *Nibbāna* also is a long process which needs more than a life-time to be fully complete. Though the bodily elements of the Buddha, in fact, belong to the world, they are parts of the Buddha and they seem to need more time to reach *nibbāna*.

Similarly, Collins points out that the destination of *nibbāna* has two stages.[15] First, the attainment of *nibbāna* during the individual's lifetime, the blowing out of the flame of desire.[16] Gombrich explains:

> *Nirvāṇa* in life is the cessation of craving, alias greed-hatred-and-delusion, and is indescribable because it is the opposite of the process of life as we know it; to discuss it in isolation is futile because you have to understand what, according to Buddhist ontology, is being negated. It is futile also for a more important reason: *nirvāṇa* is an experience, and all private experiences (e.g. falling in love) are ultimately beyond language (though they can to some extent be discussed with others who have had the experience). Experiences do have an objective facet. Objectively hunger is want of food, etc.; subjectively it is a kind of pain, imperfectly describable. My description of *nirvāṇa* as the cessation of craving is objective. As one cannot even fully describe the experience of the cessation of craving of a toothache, the indescribability of *nirvāṇa* is unsurprising. For the convenience of discourse Buddhist saints did apply various kinds of epithets to it, and thus objectify and even reify what was for them the experience of the cessation of process. Had they foreseen the confusion this would cause they might have kept silence.[17]

One must therefore see *nibbāna* during life as a specific experience, which cannot be described in terms of normal human experiences. It is an aspect of Buddhism which is difficult to understand and beyond abstract reasoning. However, it is clearly the opposite of *dukkha* (suffering).

The second stage of *nibbāna* occurs at the death of the enlightened saint, in which the flames of life-in-*saṃsāra* die out through lack of fuel.[18] This fuel refers to the psycho-physical nature of the individual who attains *nibbāna*. The passing away of *arahants* is called *parinibbāna*.[19] This raises the problem of what happens to an enlightened person beyond death: does he still exist or not? Gombrich states "The Buddha kept silence on *nibbāna* after death: it is a mystery. To discuss its objective

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[14]Landon (1939), 212.
[15]Collins (1982), 83.
[16]Collins (1982), 83.
[17]Gombrich (1972), 492.
[18]Collins (1982), 83.
[19]Tambiah (1984), 27, 45.

aspect he considered pointless; the subjective aspect no one has reported back on".[20] The Buddhist tradition has resolutely refused to speak about it.[21] One reason for this was that the Buddha saw speculating over it as a time-wasting distraction from spiritual practice.[22] Once a monk named Māluṅkyāputta told the Buddha that he would leave the *Sangha* unless he was given answers to these questions, and the Buddha gave a simile about helping a man pierced by an arrow that was thickly smeared with poison to show how foolish he was (*M.* I. 426-431).[23] If a man refused to let the doctor take the arrow out until he knew everything about the arrow, he would soon die. The Buddha considered that the above-mentioned questions were not connected with nor conducive to *nibbāna.*

Probably, some light is shed on the situation by a passage in which the Buddha discussed the above-mentioned questions on an *arahant*, equating these with questions as to whether an enlightened monk arises or not after death (*M.*I. 486-487).[24] Here he explained that while one would know whether a burning fire has been quenched, one would not know the direction the fire has gone. In the same way we only know that those who reach *parinibbāna* are completely freed from burning desire. Their state is deep, immeasurable, and unfathomable as is the great ocean. "Arise" does not apply, "does not arise" does not apply, "both arises and does not arise" does not apply, "neither arises nor does not arise" does not apply (*M.*I. 487-488).[25]

Thus the simile of the extinct fire suggests that the state of an enlightened person after death is one which is beyond normal comprehension, not that it is a state of nothingness, but that it can be referred to as no longer existing for him.[26] When *arahants* are dead, there are absolutely no grounds for saying that they are with or without a body, with or without cognition, or neither with nor without cognition.[27] It may be explained that the state of *parinibbāna* goes beyond existence in time, the cessation of conditioned phenomena. The closest hint about the condition of the *arahant* after death is the story of Godhika, who had attained *nibbāna* at the very point of death:

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[20]Gombrich (1972), 492.
[21]Collins (1982), 83.
[22]Harvey (1990), 66.
[23]*Majjhima Nikaya: The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings,* Vol.2 (1957), 97-101.
[24]*Majjhima Nikaya: The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings,* Vol.2 (1957), 164-166.
[25]*Majjhima Nikaya: The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings,* Vol.II (1957), 166.
[26]Harvey (1990), 66-67.
[27]Harvey (1990), 67.

> But just then a smokiness, a murkiness was going toward the east, was going toward the west, was going toward the north, was going toward the south, was going aloft, was going downward, was going toward intervening points.
>
> Then the Exalted One admonished the brethren: 'Do ye not see, bhikkhus, that smokiness, that murkiness going east, west, north, south, aloft, downward and in between?
>
> 'Yes, lord.'
>
> 'That, bhikkhus, is Māra the evil one, who is seeking everywhere for the consciousness of Godhika of the clansmen. "Where," he is thinking, " hath Godhika's consciousness been reinstated?" But Godhika of the clansmen, bhikkhus, with a consciousness not reinstated hath utterly ceased to live.'
>
> *Saṃyutta Nikaya* I. 122.[28]

The Buddha affirmed that Māra's quest was in vain, since the unsupported consciousness of Godhika is no longer conditioned by constructing activities or any objects, it must be unconditioned and beyond *dukkha*, no longer a *khandha*.[29]

La Vallée Poussin, however, gives three alternative understandings of the status of the *arahant* after death:

> But it can be maintained either (1) that the dead Saint is anihilated, cut off, does not exist any longer; or (2) that he has reached an immortal state; or (3) that we can only assert, without being able to state positively what deliverance is, that he is delivered from transmigration.[30]

It is most likely that Thai Buddhists choose the second and the third alternative for some of them still worship popular monks who have passed away. They seek protection from these monks by wearing amulets consecrated to them. Thai Buddhists believe that there is a communication between *arahants* who have passed away and their disciples. After Acharn Mun passed away, his disciples still see him coming to instruct and advise them in visions during their meditation.[31] This example indicates that Thai Buddhists believe that though *arahants* have attained *parinibbāna*, they still maintain the role of instructors, helping meditators to attain *arahantship*. This continuous concern of *arahants* for meditators will dismiss the accusation of Mahayana Buddhists who think that *arahants* are selfish; they replace *arahants* with *bodhisattvas* who are reborn repeatedly out of compassion for suffering beings so that they too can be freed from rebirth. Thai Buddhists do not have the same problem as Mahayāna Buddhists because Thai Buddhists see that *arahants* who have already reached *parinibbāna* are able to communicate with meditators; they do not need to be

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[28]*Saṃyutta Nikaya: The Book of the Kindred Sayings* Vol. I (1917), 152.
[29]Harvey (1990), 67.
[30]La Vallée Poussin (1917), 115.
[31]Tambiah (1984), 110.

reborn to instruct them.[32] The state of *arahants* after *parinibbāna* still remains mysterious.

Though *nibbāna* is the ultimate goal of Buddism, not every Buddhist expects to reach it within this life. Spiro divides Buddhism into three categories: *nibbānic* Buddhism, concerned with releasing from the Wheel, or *nibbāna*; *kammatic* Buddhism, concerned with improving one's position on the Wheel by improving one's *kamma*; *apotropaic* Buddhism, concerned with man's worldly welfare.[33] However, the authors of the book *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation* do not agree with this distinction because they find that the approach of seeing the sharp contrasting of ascetisim of Buddhist monks on the one hand and the seemingly materialistic interest of the laity in securing more comfortable rebirths is simplistic and misleading.[34]

Therefore, this distinction cannot entirely separate Buddhists. Some of them may change their aim and some while holding *nibbāna* as their soteriological aim choose a better position after rebirth as their second choice. Most Buddhists think that they are not yet spiritually qualified to practise *nibbānic* Buddhism. Many of them choose to be reborn because they do not want to absent themselves from this world no matter how bad the world is. Dhammapada views the world as corrupted:

> How can there be laughter, how can there be pleasure, when the whole world is burning? When you are in deep darkness, will you not ask for a lamp?
>
> Consider this body! A painted puppet with jointed limbs, sometimes suffering covered with ulcers, full of imaginings, never permanent, for ever changing.
>
> This body is decaying! A nest of diseases, a heap of corruption, bound to destruction, to dissolution. All life ends in death.
>
> *Dhammapada* 146-148.[35]

Thus, it can be seen that everybody will finally reach *nibbāna* when the world is ended. But since the world itself is not destroyed, we have to destroy the world which we create for ourselves and perceive for ourselves by realising the way the world really is.[36] It can also be said that those who are not born into the world would not experience suffering. As the Buddha says:

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[32]See the story of Acharn Mun's encounters with a number of Buddhas in Tambiah (1984), 98-99.
[33]Spiro (1971), 12.
[34]Sizemore and Swearer (eds.), *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation* (1990), 1. The authors in this volume are Russell F. Sizemore , Donald K. Swearer, Phra Rājavaramuni, Frank E. Reynolds, David Little, John Strong, Nancy Auer Falk, Steven Kemper, Charles F. Keyes, Robin W. Lovin, Ronald M. Green. and John P. Reeder, Jr.
[35]Dhammapada (1973), 56.
[36]*The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 54.

> I say, friend, that where one is not born, does not age or die, or pass from one state to another, or arise again–that world's end is not to be known, seen or reached by travelling.
>
> Yet I do not say that there is an end of dukkha without reaching world's end. Rather, it is in this fathom-long body, with perception and thought, that I make known the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world.
>
> *Saṃyutta Nikaya,* I, 62.[37]

Those who die from the world by letting go of a sense of self and abiding in the seeing, will attain *nibbāna.*

One *sutta* uses the metaphor of an island to describe the state of *nibbāna*:

> There is an island, an island which you cannot go beyond. It is a place of nothingness, a place of non-possession and of non-attachment. It is the total end of death and decay, and this is why I call it nibbana [the extinguished, the cool].
>
> There are people who, in mindfulness, have realised this and are completely cooled here and now.
>
> *Sutta Nipata,* verse 1094-5.[38]

The image of an island is used probably because of its isolation from the flood of existence. If one lives on a secluded island he is not able to transmigrate to another place; he will not be reborn. What is not born does not decay and die.

A universal symbol of worldliness is wealth. Therefore it is helpful to consider how Buddhists view wealth in the light of *nibbāna* as their goal. Rājavaramuni points out that those scholars who characterise Buddism as an ascetic religion make a mistake; he considers Buddhism as a religion of the Middle Way which teaches that both the extreme of asceticism and the extreme of sensual indulgence are to be avoided.[39] Therefore Buddhists will not be attached to wealth, and in the same time will not discredit wealth. Even monks who live a very simple life have to depend on the wealth of lay people as Rājavaramuni explains:

> According to the *vinaya,* a monk is dependent on the lay people for food and other material necessities. The monks get their food for daily meals during the morning alms round, but they are sometimes invited to the houses of donors, or the latter may also present food to them at the monastery (e.g., Vin.I.58). This practice binds the monks' life to that of the lay society and keeps them in daily contact with lay people. As the Buddha himself says, "my livelihood is bound up with others" (A.V.87). Monks are exhorted to contemplate this fact again and again, so that they will be earnest both in their exertion for their individual perfection and in working for the good of the laity...
>
> Monks performs this task for the good of lay society not only as an act of returning favors, but out of their own virtue of compassion for the people. Such compassion was stressed by Buddha when he sent out his first group of disciples to teach the *dhamma* in the first year after his enlightenment: "Go, monks, on your journey, for the profit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion

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[37]This translation is taken from *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 53-54.
[38]This translation is taken from *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 63.
[39]Rājavaramuni (1990), 29-30.

> for the world, for the welfare, the profit, the happiness of gods and men" (Vin. I, 20).[40]

In the study of Ayutthaya, a province of Thailand, Bunnag also noticed the mutual relationship between laypeople and monks:

> As far as the monks of Ayutthaya were concerned, however, the time and effort expended upon study or meditation was insignificant when compared with that which was devoted to pastoral activities of various kinds. These pastoral transactions which take place between *bhikkhu* and householder consist in essence of the monk's conferring merit upon the layman who in turn expresses his gratitude and respect by presenting offerings of money, food and other items traditionally included, such as a pair of candles and lotus-bud. The ascetic routine adopted by the individual who enters the Buddhist *Sangha* gives him a higher spiritual status which enables him to confer merit upon those still enmeshed in the sensory world.[41]

From the statements of Rājavaramuni and Bunnag, it is clear that apart from their pursue of *nibbāna*, monks in Thailand are concerned with the welfare of laypersons. Both are able to help each other to reach their goal. The laypersons help monks by providing daily physical needs. Therefore monks can devote their time to studying the Pali Scripture and meditating to attain *nibbāna*. Monks, in turn, provide pastoral care for laypersons and teach them the *dhamma* so the laypersons will have an opportunity to attain *nibbāna* too. Even if they are not able to attain *nibbāna* as quickly as monks, they will be able to accumulate merits and have a better position to attain it after rebirth. It is a natural truth that people can be found at different stages of spiritual development. However, all people should have the opportunity to be trained and educated according to their individual effort toward attainment and perfection. The mutual contact between Buddhist monks and laypersons provides a healthy development process for both parties.

When monks go out on their daily alms rounds, they provide laypersons an opportunity to detach themselves from their wealth by practising everyday giving. Laypersons do not donate food to favoured monks but give food to every passing monk indiscrimately. Similarly, monks do not allow themselves to become "attached" to donated food in a covetousness manner, as some foreigners believe. The donated food generally benefits not only monks, but also a number of people who come to seek shelter in the monasteries. Monasteries have become places where the destitute, orphans, and students can live, obtain sufficient food, and receive moral and educational training.[42]

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[40]Rājavaramuni (1990), 33-34.
[41]Bunnag (1973), 59.
[42]Rājavaramuni (1990), 34.

Keyes observes that despite the fact that very few villagers in northeastern Thailand consciously aspire to *nibbāna*, their concern for it is present in the ideal of "non-attachment".[43] This ideal pervades the "precepts" (*sīn* from *sīla*) to which villagers commit themselves. Occasionally, some people will observe "eight precepts" (*sīn pāēt*) instead of just "five precepts" (*sīn hā*), especially on the Buddhist Sabbath. Laypersons may not be able to emulate the non-attachment of monks, but insofar as they do observe the precepts, they too act with reference to the ideal of *nibbāna*.[44]

Despite the changed world, villagers in Ban Nọng Tụn, located in the central northeast Thai province of Mahasarakham, continue to hold the Buddhist idea that human existence in any guise is ultimately characterized by suffering.[45] Keyes observes "Villagers acquire the ability to act in the world while still being detached from–or, at least, having tempered–the desire characteristic of the world through processes of spiritual discipline".[46] However, these processes are different for women than for men because women and men have different problems of attachment to the world. Keyes notices:

> For women, the problem is understood primarily in terms of their relationship to children. In anticipation of the pain that will be felt when her children are separated from her through early death (a common occurrence until quite recently), through marriage and the formation of their own families, or through the renunciation of the world by sons who join the *sangha*, a Thai-Lao woman observes the postpartum rite of "lying by the fire" (*yū fai*). This rite involves an ascetic-like mortification of the flesh, as for several days (longer for the first birth than for subsequent ones) a woman rests near a fire so hot it produces burns. During this period she consumes nothing but a medicinal broth that is cooked over the fire. The denial of solid food during this sequestering rite can be juxtaposed with the later woman's practice of giving food not only to her own children but to the *sangha*.
>
> For men, the problem of attachment is understood as involving first and foremost a desire for sexual gratification and secondarily for social dominance. To gain control of these desires, a man should enter the monkhood and subject himself to the discipline (*vinaya*) of the *sagha*. Most Thai-Lao men still enter the *sangha* for a temporary period, and for the three months or longer they spend as a novice or monk they forswear all sexual activities, spurn any interest in personal possessions other than those few allowed to a member of the order, and reduce their meals to two a day, both before noon. As all women return to the world after their "lying by the fire," almost all men return to the world after having served in the *sangha*. Through these experiences many Thai-Lao become more self-conscious about their desires and gain some ability to control them even as they assume worldly roles.[47]

From these examples it can be deduced that many Thai Buddhists experience the state of non-attachment at least temporarily. Many Thai men, after leaving the monkhood,

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[43]Keyes (1990), 175.
[44]Keyes (1990), 176.
[45]Keyes (1990), 186.
[46]Keyes (1990), 186.
[47]Keyes (1990), 186-187.

work in the secular world and use techniques which they have learned in monasteries to control their desires. If they are fully in control of their desires, they will be able to attain *nibbāna* because *nibbāna* is attained by the total extinction of craving. It can be also stated that though many Thai Buddhists do not expect to fully accomplish *nibbāna* (100%) in their lifetime, they are able to attain it in certain degrees (50%, 70%, 90%). Becoming a monk or *bhikkhu* is not a lifetime commitment. Thai Buddhists are allowed to move freely between the two realms; from secular world to monastery and vice versa. This movement helps Thai Buddhists to cultivate self-awareness and non-attachment from desire. The cultivation of these qualities will create the distinctive work ethic that will control greed and selfishness.

The concept of *nibbāna* also relates to the doctrine of *anatta*, for, ethically, *anatta* means non-attachment particularly to the false notion of the self or soul which is the root cause of all evil. When *nibbāna* is described as a state of supreme bliss, questions arise: "If in reality there is no self, who is it that attains Nirvana and experiences happiness? Is Nirvana total annihilation or eternal bliss?".[48] The problems arise because of the complication of the meaning of *anatta*. Some people argue that *anatta* is inconsistent with rebirth and reject the latter as not belonging to the teaching of the Buddha because according to them *anatta* is literally a total denial of the self; death is final and there is nothing that survives death. However, Theravāda Buddhism has claimed that the doctrine of *anatta* is consistent with the belief in rebirth and explains that "the person who is born is neither the same nor is he another."[49] *Anatta* implies the realization of the emptiness of oneself and this realization is *nibbāna*. It is an experience in which self has been completely transcended; an experience of supreme bliss when nothing of self remains.[50] This does not mean that *nibbāna* is annihilation. Although *nibbāna* means the complete extinction of the physical aspect (*rūpa*) of life, its spiritual aspect of mind (*nāma*) remains.[51] One *sutta* describes *nibbāna* as an unknown state:

> As a blazing spark struck from iron
> Gradually fades to an unknown course [state],
> So the one who's truly won release,
> Crossed the floods of sensuality's bonds
> And reached immovable peace,
> Goes to a course that transcends definition.
>
> *Udana*, page 93.[52]

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[48]De Silva (1977), 109.
[49]De Silva (1977), 109.
[50]De Silva (1977), 113-114.
[51]Spiro (1971), 58.
[52]*The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 64.

Since this *sutta* describes *nibbāna* as the crossing from the sensory world to the calm world, it may be say that *nibbāna* is not annihilation. The destination of *nibbāna* is immovable peace. It transcends definition and goes beyond all concepts.

However, Buddhadāsa thinks that *nibbāna* is not a transcendent condition attainable only after years or perhaps lives spent purging the mind of impurities, but, like *cit-wang* or *sati*,[53] is the original condition of the mind.[54] He sees *nibbāna* as the mind's basic condition, an original state of mental equilibrium to be retained by remaining mindful and by not allowing the delusions and ignorance of "I"–"mine" to arise.[55] Buddhadāsa's interpretation seems to indicate that the original state of human mind is pure and *nibbāna* is in fact the state of mind that is not disturbed by outside influence. This understanding is similar to a Christian's understanding of the first Adam before the Fall. *Nibbāna* is reachable for everyone because it is already situated in the human mind; it is the matter of controlling one's own mind.

Buddhadāsa divides *nibbāna* into three levels: *tadanganibbāna, vikhambhananibbāna* and *samucchedanibbāna* or *parinibbāna*.[56] *Tandanganibbāna* is the state that comes about momentarily when external conditions happen; it is the attainment of mental calm because of the influence of a peaceful environment.[57] *Vikhambhananibbāna* is the mental calm attained because of the mental control exercised in *samadhi* meditation, in which intense concentration arrests or paralyses the arising *kilesa*.[58] These two levels of *nibbāna* are still not permanent, because they depend on outside circumstances. In contrast, *samucchedanibbāna* the highest level is the mental peace that results from the actual ending rather than the simple repression of mind-disturbing *kilesa*.[59] By expanding the meaning of *nibbāna* into three levels Buddhadāsa does not make *nibbāna* as an easily attained goal but a more intelligible goal; it can be more clearly understood by laypersons. He admits that *nibbāna* is an ineffable condition:

> This is the difficulty or depth of its (*nibbāna's*) meaning, for the world (of human learning) still lacks any linguistic term to denote a condition which is far, far beyond the world–a condition that is attained by following neither goodness nor evil, neither

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[53]Buddhadāsa means mindfulness of breathing. He proposes that in practicing the most basic form of Buddhist meditation, mindfulness of breathing or *anapanasati*, sufficient concentration or *samadhi* is developed to permit liberative insight into reality. [Jackson (1988), 191.]
[54]Jackson (1988), 165.
[55]Jackson (1988), 165.
[56]Jackson (1988), 165-166.
[57]Jackson (1988), 165.
[58]Jackson (1988), 165.
[59]Jackson (1988), 166.

> happiness nor suffering–but which we must yet request to call, in the manner of a supposition, the blessed *nibbāna*.[60]

However, *nibbāna* for Buddhadāsa is indescribable not because it is a state beyond the material world, but because it is beyond the mental world of human beings which is disturbed by ignorance. Without diluting the quality of *nibbāna*, Buddhadāsa maintains that the layperson who experiences the occasional peaceful bliss of *tadanganibbāna* has tasted true salvation, even if only momentarily.[61] This recognition not only helps laypersons to see that *nibbāna* is accessible to all Buddhists but also helps them to see that it is immediate. Though no Buddhists can claim that they reach *nibbāna,* according to Buddhadāsa's interpretation *nibbāna* can be obtained.

From all the evidence given above we may summarise that Buddhists in modern Thai society still try to reach *nibbāna* though many of them do not consider it as an immediate goal. They maintain that it is an attainable goal. Thai Buddhists' views are quite different from Sinhalese Buddhists who think that *śāsanē* (religion) has already declined so far that it is no longer possible for men to attain *nibbāna*.[62] In spite of the rapid influence of modernization in Thailand, many Buddhists still hold to the traditional value of non-attachment which derives from the concept of *nibbāna*. They continue to have a chance to see forest monks who reach *nibbāna*. Also in their daily alms giving, they come into contact with local monks who set the example of a simple lifestyle. Moreover, they can occasionally practise meditation, experience mental calm and learn to control their desires. Male Buddhists can even become monks themselves for a certain period appropriate to their circumstances. They have the opportunity to live a simple lifestyle and have more time to meditate and study Pali scripture. They can move between being laity and clergy as many times as they want. There are several ways for them to choose how to reach *nibbāna*. Moreover, they are able to decide how soon they want to reach *nibbāna;* in the immediate future or in the next life.

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[60]cited in Jackson (1988), 166.
[61]Jackson (1988), 167.
[62]Gombrich (1971), 285.

Part Three

Chapter Fourteen

The Comparison of the Teachings in Ecclesiastes and Buddhism

The points of discussion in this chapter derive from the materials found in the two previous parts. Therefore it will include only main points and summaries of the ideas that have been discussed, focusing on points of comparison:

1) God and the Law of *Kamma*
2) *Hebel* and *Dukkha*
3) Observation and Meditation
4) The Sages and *Arahants*
5) Work and Merit-making
6) Joy and *Nibbāna*

The topics compared in this chapter may differ from more conventional comparisons (Buddhism and Christianity;[1] the Buddha and the Christ[2]), partly because this thesis places greater emphasis on Ecclesiastes, and partly because of the nature of the material compared.

God and the Law of *Kamma*

When people who are familiar with Buddhism read Ecclesiastes 1:4: "A generation goes and another generation comes, but the earth remains forever", they tend to think that this idea of repetition is similar to the law of *kamma* in Buddhism. Chinese theologian Choan-Seng Song relates the concept of *kamma* to the idea of repetition in Ecclesiastes chapter one especially verses 2-3; 5-7 and 9-11. He exclaims "What a fascinating insight into the karmic reality of life [is] to be found in the Christian Bible!".[3] It is true that we can find the idea of repetition many times in Ecclesiastes, especially in the introductory poem. Qohelet has observed many events in this world

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[1]King, *Buddhism and Christianity*, (1963). Smart, *Buddhism and Christianity*, (1993). Yagi, and Swidler, *A Bridge to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*, (1990). Yu, *Early Buddhism and Christianity*, (1986).
[2]Streeter, *The Buddha and The Christ*, (1932).
[3]Song, (1982), 183.

and concludes that there is nothing new under the sun (1:9). Streeter thinks that Qohelet had the idea of rebirth or transmigration (*kamma*) in mind.[4] However, we do not have any evidence to prove Streeter's hypothesis. Rather Qohelet understands that God has set up a complete system to operate the world. Although Qohelet cannot explain all the phenomena that happen in this world, he recognises that God is the person who is responsible. Buddhists, on the other hand, believe that this world is operated by the law of *kamma.* Nothing in their lives and in the world happens by chance. Many scholars who work in the field of World Religions may want to compare God with *dhamma* (the natural law) seeing it as having the same power as the Christian God.[5] In my opinion it is potentially more instructive to compare *torah* with *dhamma.* For *dhamma* is the central teaching of the Buddha and *torah* is the divinely revealed instruction to the Jews. But Qohelet does not place any significant emphasis on *torah.*[6] Consequently, this thesis argues that the concept of God in Ecclesiastes is unique and suggests that it is the basic foundation for Qohelet's understanding of the phenomena of this world, as the law of *kamma* is the basic system to explain the cause of events, especially those which happen to human beings.

Although Qohelet frequently challenges traditional teachings, he never questions the existence of God. However, he never uses the name יהוה at all. Rather he refers to God as אֱלֹהִים the more general term, indicating that God is not limited to the national God of Israel. God, according to Qohelet, is the creator of the world and has supreme power to control everything in it. In contrast, despite his claim that he was able to recall his former habitations from his first life onward, the Buddha taught that there is no known beginning to the cycle of rebirths and the world. Instead of looking toward God as creator, Buddhists believe that human beings are their own creators through the law of *kamma.*

In Ecclesiastes, there is no mention of any direct contact between God and human beings. God seems to be distant from human beings. However, God does not leave human beings to do whatever they want. Events in this world happen according to God's plan. Similarly, the law of *kamma* is a concept that explains existence in this present life. According to Buddhism, the cycle of rebirths is the human predicament which is controlled by actions in previous lives. Nobody knows exactly what they have done in the past that causes them to be born as they are. Only some who seriously practice meditation are able to find out about their own past lives. Many Buddhists believe that whatever happens to them at present derives from their actions in the past.

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[4]Streeter, (1932), 64.

[5]See my discussion on this issue in chapter nine on *Kamma.*

[6]Only the editor of the book reminds the reader to keep God's command (12:13).

They cannot change the past, but they believe that they can change the future by making more merit, hoping that they will have a better life in the future. Therefore many Buddhists live their lives for the future. They hold on to the idea of cause and effect.

Likewise, sages in Proverbs teach that the righteous will receive rewards for their good deeds. However, Qohelet points out that human beings will not be able to change the course of events, because God has already fixed His plan. God does not reveal His plan to human beings, so nobody can know for certain what will happen in the future. Qohelet finds that results and actions are not always directly related. He sees that there are righteous people to whom things happen according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom things happen according to the deeds of the righteous (8:14). Applying the principle of the law of *kamma,* Buddhists explain that the righteous receive what is due to the wicked because in their previous lives they acted wickedly. The result of their wicked deeds finally appears in this present life. On the other hand the wicked, instead of being punished, receive rewards because in their previous lives they made enough merit to bring about beneficial results in this life. Their bad deeds in this life will be recorded and will be dealt with in the future. The principle of cause and effect continues to operate from past or present lives to future lives. Qohelet, however, does not try to explain the problem of injustice. He only points out that it exists. He leaves this problem to God, for human beings can never understand the ways of God. He has full authority over all events in this world. Qohelet considers that all the good things human beings have are gifts from God. Some people are excluded from negative circumstances because they are favoured by God.

Although Qohelet is not happy with what he has seen in this world, he admits that there is nothing that he can do about it. For he believes that God has created the world within a closed system so that human beings will fear Him (Eccl. 3:14-15). He does not speak for or try to help the oppressed. He sees that because of injustice the dead are better than the living (4:1-2). He also remarks that we should not be surprised when we see injustices (5:7). He believes in divine retribution, but he does not explain how it operates. He seems to have a passive view toward injustice. Similarly the law of *kamma* leads to self-reliance, without complaining about circumstances. Buddhists generally accept that their bad fortune is the consequence of their bad *kamma* in the past. If a Thai businessman is cheated by another company and he has no way to recover his losses, his friends will gossip among themselves that this man might have cheated somebody else in his previous life. The businessman himself may admit that this injustice has prior causes and blame his bad *kamma* on his previous life. The owner of the company who took his money will feel the effects in the future. Therefore

those who face injustice in this world will receive justice in the future according to the law of *kamma.*

In Ecclesiastes, the idea that God is distant is prominent; however, Qohelet includes God's intervention in his system of belief. He warns the wicked that they should not be overly wicked, otherwise they will die before their time. Buddhists, on the other hand do not accept God's intervention at all, despite the fact that they never consider the law of *kamma* to be a strict rule. Buddhists regard the law of *kamma* as one of the natural laws. They acknowledge that any event in this world may be the result of a combination of the law of *kamma* and other laws. Although the law of *kamma* seems to be a fixed system, it is not the sole controller of all events. When Buddhists cannot find any obvious reason for a certain event, they use the law of *kamma* to explain it. When Qohelet cannot find a satisfactory answer, he leaves it to God. He does not try to answer all the problems, instead he asks "Who knows?". For him many events in this world remain a mystery.

For Buddhists, the law of *kamma* is an important concept to explain the existence of suffering in this world. They see that those who are reborn are coming back to face the consequences of their actions. The only way for them to break the cycle of rebirths is by reaching the goal of *nibbāna.* According to Buddhist tradition, *nibbāna* can erase all the effects of bad *kamma* in the past. If there is no cycle of rebirths, human beings do not need to seek *nibbāna.* Buddhists who cannot attain *nibbāna* have to depend on their own efforts and do more good deeds to secure a better future. Qohelet, on the other hand, does not pay attention to the afterlife. He thinks that life ends at death. He regards both good and bad things as coming from God. He points out that all the good things that human beings have are gifts of God. Human beings cannot depend on their own efforts to gain more wealth. They cannot argue with God about what they do not get because He has full authority over everything.

We do not have enough evidence about whether Qohelet had knowledge of the law of *kamma* or not. It seems that he did not know about it. If he knew about it at all, he would definitely have disagreed with it. Instead of believing in the law of *kamma,* Qohelet would probably have believed in the law of chance because he saw that actions and consequences are not directly related. He advises that when there is a chance to enjoy life, human beings should grasp it before it is too late. He also suggests that we should divide our portion into seven or even eight ways, for we do not know what will happen (11:2).

In short we can see that Buddhists use the law of *kamma* to explain many events that cannot be proven by explicit reasons. Likewise Qohelet admits that events in this world cannot be simply explained. He challenges those who claim to know the

future. He leaves all the unanswered problems to God, who is inscrutable. Therefore he accepts the world as it is and continues to live on. What is more he advises people, especially the young, to live their lives to the full while they have the opportunity.

Hebel and *Dukkha*

Suffering seems to be a universal phenomenon recognised by people from ancient times to modern. The Israelites experienced great suffering before Moses led them out of Egypt. Many Jews cannot forget the brutality of the Holocaust. Although Jewish people learn from their history that God did intervene to deliver their ancestors, the problem of suffering still remains..They tend to ask: "Why does God not participate more often?".[7] Song makes a strong remark: "Asians do not have to look for suffering; it comes to them".[8] Bowker states, "Of all religions, Buddhism is the one which concentrates most immediately and directly on suffering".[9] By observing human experiences in general both Qohelet and the Buddha come to the conclusion that suffering is a universal experience. Qohelet uses the Hebrew term הֶבֶל (*hebel*) to describe this fact, while the Buddha uses the Pali term *dukkha*. Qohelet begins and ends his discourse with the phrase הַכֹּל הֶבֶל "all is futile" in 1:2 and 12:8. The first sermon of the Buddha which summarises the Four Noble Truths discusses the problem of suffering, and shows the way to resolve this problem. The first Noble Truth indicates that suffering *dukkha* is a universal fact. The Buddha saw that all earthly existence is indeed sorrowful. The nuances of הֶבֶל and *dukkha* are quite extensive; they cover physical pains to mental anguish. Fredericks points out that any reading of Ecclesiastes is based on one's estimation of הֶבֶל (*hebel*).[10] Unfortunately, he limits the nuance of הֶבֶל to "transience", arguing that Ecclesiastes describes the human condition as being limited in its duration.[11] Although he acknowledges the passages that describe the shortcomings of a long life (6:3, 6),[12] he is not aware that הֶבֶל means more than shortness of life; it refers to failure of life as well. Indeed, the semantic range of הֶבֶל includes transience but it also includes unfairness, absurdity, injustice, no progress, no satisfaction, and unpredictability. Likewise, *dukkha* is related to two other Pali terms *anicca* (impermanence) and *anattā* (no self or lack of control). The doctrines of *anicca* and *anattā* are the two basic concepts that explain the origin of suffering. Human

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[7]Bowker (1970), 7.
[8]Song (1982),163.
[9]Bowker (1970), 237.
[10]Fredericks (1993), 14-15.
[11]Fredericks (1993), 31.
[12]Fredericks (1993), 40-41.

beings suffer because they hold on to impermanent things and lack the ability to control their own lives. Thus the semantic range of הֶבֶל encompasses the concepts of *dukkha, anicca* and *anattā*. However, the concept of *dukkha* is closer to הֶבֶל. Unfortunately, the committee that translated the Bible into Thai in 1971 decided to translate the word הֶבֶל as *anicca*. Though the word *anicca* carries the significant meaning of הֶבֶל as impermanence or transience, it does not cover other meanings of הֶבֶל. Similarly, though the sense of lack of control in *anattā* can be seen in הֶבֶל, it does not cover the whole range of meanings of הֶבֶל and Qohelet would not agree with the idea of "no self" taught by the Buddha. Therefore the best choice among the three in terms of rendering the idea of הֶבֶל is *dukkha* because it has a wider semantic range than the two terms above. It is also a common word that is known by most Thais.

Both Qohelet and the Buddha focus their observation on the present life rather than the past or the future. They are more concerned with daily situations. They do not place any emphasis on the situation of life after death. The Buddha considers rebirth as suffering. He refers to past lives to explain present suffering. And he also points out that if a person is reborn after death, he will still suffer in the future. Therefore he suggests that human beings should break the cycle of rebirth in this life. He teaches human beings the way to release themselves from *dukkha* by suggesting that there is no "real me" (*anattā*) in human existence. The cessation of suffering can happen if human beings recognise the concept of *anattā*. This doctrine teaches that each individual is not the owner of his body since he cannot fully control it. If human beings realise that they cannot control their own bodies, they will not hold on to them. When they are ill, they will peacefully accept illness as a fact of life. They will not try to resist the forces of decay. Qohelet focuses on studying and exploring everything that is done under the sun. Sometimes he investigates things empirically, at other times he argues on the basis of personal observation of others, and concludes that everything is futile. Qohelet challenges those who hold on to the view that they will find justice in the afterlife, asking them, "Who knows what will come afterward?". He does not offer a solution to end suffering, but he advises that one can be consoled by enjoying life. But Buddhists are not satisfied with this advice because they regard the idea of enjoying life as being impermanent. Qohelet does not make a connection between suffering in this life and actions in previous lives. Moreover, he thinks that those who have already died do not experience suffering anymore. Qohelet maintains that human beings suffer only when they are alive. Buddhism, however, does not teach that suffering ceases at death. Suffering will be cease when human beings detach themselves from this world.

Both the Buddha and Qohelet recognise the changing circumstances of human experience. They agree that human beings cannot control their own situations. The

Buddha considers that everything in this world is impermanent *anicca*. Human beings suffer because they desire impermanent things, they focus on the transitory. It is obvious that *anicca* is part of a system of belief that opposes eternity. Instead of seeking eternal life, Buddhists are looking for a permanent cessation of existence. Qohelet is aware of the unpredictability of the future. Circumstances change according to time and chance (3:1-8). He warns that the race does not belong to the swift, nor the battle to the mighty, nor bread to the wise, nor wealth to the clever, nor favour to the educated (9:11). Therefore human beings cannot rely on their own ability, wealth, wisdom and strength. However, Qohelet does not think that everything in this world is impermanent. Some things may change but others remain the same. He sees that, despite the changing generations of human beings, the earth remains forever (1:4, cf. 1:15).

The Buddha emphasises that the causes of suffering derive mainly from the innermost being of each individual. Each individual has full responsibility for his own suffering. Suffering will cease when each person knows how to control his desire and how to look at surrounding circumstances. Suffering for each individual began when that person desired to be reborn. It is the will of the person that causes rebirth. Thus, for Buddhism, to be reborn in this world is suffering. At this point, we may say that Buddhists believe in the afterlife, even though their belief is different from the belief of Christians. For Buddism, the real cessation of suffering occurs once a person reaches the state of *nibbāna*. On the other hand Qohelet thinks that the main cause of suffering is death because he sees that death can destroy all the good things that human beings have experienced. Qohelet thinks that the beauty of life is ended at death. If he can choose between life and death he prefers to live, admitting that there is a mixture of sadness and happiness in life. However he does not think that long life will enable human beings to overcome suffering. Instead he remarks that those who live long but do not know how to enjoy life should not be born at all. He suggests that the frustration of human beings is caused by outside circumstances. Human beings are not able to control the situations around them. They do not get what they expect. They do not know the will of God. They have to depend on God's mercy. Some people do not suffer as much as others because God is pleased with them. Buddhists, on the other hand, think that some people suffer less because of the merit from their previous life. Qohelet sees that individual fortune depends on chance and divine will. He believes that God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to the person who pleases Him, while the sinner takes the trouble of gathering and amassing wealth only to hand it to the person who pleases God. However, the Buddha sees that present outcomes are controlled by previous *kamma*. A person suffers because of his own bad *kamma*. The

Buddha does not pay attention to the involvement of divine beings in human affairs. It is an irony for Buddhism to emphasise that human beings have to work for their own salvation after teaching that human beings are not able to control their own situations.

Observation and Meditation

King compares Christian prayer with Buddhist meditation, seeing that they are spiritual techniques of a given religion for achieving its desired results.[13] He points out that "Prayer is at the heart of all Christian piety and devotion; and meditation is the one and only way recognized by Buddhism for the attainment of its highest spiritual goals".[14] However, Qohelet does not see that prayer is important. In 5:1-6, he warns that prayer is more dangerous than useful for most people. Instead of prayer, Qohelet spends his time understanding the reality of life by observation. Qohelet uses the Hebrew word רָאָה (to see) about 50 times. We may summarise the usage of this verb found in Ecclesiastes in four categories: 1) general observation; 2) personal experience and insight; 3) enjoyment; and 4) satisfaction. However, the verb is most often used in the first two categories and we will focus on these two categories when we do the comparison with Buddhist meditation. The other two Hebrew verbs that relate to the idea of observation are יָדַע and מָצָא. These three Hebrew verbs are sometimes used synonymously. But if we look at their usage in Ecclesiastes as a whole, we will notice that there are three levels of knowledge, varying in levels of certainty and in possibility of attainment. The most certain knowledge is expressed by רָאָה which is straightforward and obvious. On the other hand, יָדַע is always tentative knowledge because of the limitations imposed by the future. The third form of knowledge, מָצָא cannot even be held tentatively because it is beyond the grasp of human beings.

After the introductory poem, Qohelet begins to report about his personal search to understand events in the world. His search is quite exceptional because it is exclusively personal and independent. Many times he disagrees with traditional wisdom. He says, "I gave my heart to seek and to search..." (1:13); "I spoke with my heart..." (1:16); "I gave my heart to know..." (1:17). Qohelet's knowledge is first hand perception. Qohelet gains his knowledge through "seeing" while the sages in the wisdom tradition gained their knowledge through "hearing" what their fathers or their teacher taught.[15] Likewise Buddist meditation is a purely personal experience. The Buddha himself achieved enlightenment when he meditated alone under a peepul-tree.

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[13]King (1963), 136.
[14]King (1963), 136.
[15]Fox (1989), 98.

King defines Buddhist meditation as a solitary experience, solitary in every way; self-enclosed, similar psychologically to a day-dream; self's aloneness with self, if possible, physically, but necessarily so, psychically.[16] Therefore those who want to practise meditation need to learn specific techniques to control the mind. The state of mind is crucial for Buddhist meditation. Buddhism believes that our mind consists of two disparate parts: a depth which is calm and quiet, and a surface which is disturbed. To reach the depth and bypass the surface, the meditators need to focus their attention on particular objects. The aim of meditation is to produce conditions that are conducive to the maturing of the mind so that a person can see things as they are. The Hebrew word לֵב (heart) has several functions and one of them is intellectual. Therefore we can render this word as mind. Qohelet uses his mind to evaluate all the things he has observed. Clearly, both Qohelet and the Buddha regard the mind as the central part of each individual, evaluating experiences and providing the basis for appropriate actions.

Moreover, Qohelet considers some issues several times. He looks at a particular issue from different angles. He himself explores every possibility (2:1-18). Although he claims that his mind saw much wisdom and knowledge (1:16), he does not claim to know everything. Instead he challenges those who may have claimed to know by a rhetorical question, "Who knows?". He admits that some topics are too deep for human beings to fathom. Nobody can understand divine activity and the future life. Qohelet recognises his own limitations, realising that it is impossible for him to grasp real wisdom, knowing the meaning of everything (7:23-24). Qohelet does not attempt to go beyond the human realm. His understanding of events is based on his physical presence in this world. On the other hand, in Buddhist meditation, meditators have to remove themselves from normal environments, at least mentally. They regard normal circumstances as obstructions to their search for wisdom. Meditators reflect on life by cultivating wisdom which sees things "as they really are". The Buddha teaches that everything is impermanent. Meditators have to reflect and meditate on this truth until they are able to realise that their body is indeed only a composite of physical factors, transient in nature. The person who reaches this state, liberates himself from attachment. However, this state is not the final goal of Buddhism. Therefore those who reach this state should not just stop here. They should move on until they reach *nibbāna*. In Buddhist meditation, meditators have to focus their time and efforts on reaching each stage of attainment. Qohelet acknowledges that there are several levels of knowledge, but he only focuses on the level that most people can apprehend. He also dismisses speculations about the future.

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[16]King (1963), 138.

Buddhist meditation is an instrument that helps people detach themselves from the world. However, there is no guarantee that everybody who practises meditation will reach the final goal. Instead of advising his audience to detach themselves from the world, Qohelet encourages them to be content with what they have. Real contentment does not derive from wealth or money (4:8; 5:9). Human beings can be truly satisfied by eating, drinking and enjoying life, for these are the gifts of God. From this observation, Qohelet learns that there is nothing better than to be happy and to enjoy life (3:12). Qohelet's view of the world is different from the way Buddhism views the world. Buddhism teaches that everything is impermament; things are fleeting. Qohelet partly agrees with Buddhism since he observes that all beings meet the same fate. However, he sees that everything in this world is real and there are many good things for human beings to enjoy. Warning that one should not rely on one's own wealth, Qohelet advises that one should enjoy life by means of wealth. Qohelet uses his insight gained from observations to teach people how to live happily in the real world. Life is indeed short, but human beings can be satisfied with their lives if they know how to make use of the resources in this world. In contrast, Buddhism teaches that there is no real satisfaction. Instead of searching for satisfaction, Buddhism suggests that human beings should seek real tranquillity of mind through meditation. Although the advice given by Qohelet and the Buddha is different, they both start from the same point, seeking a solution to an unsatisfactory situation.

Although some meditators may not be able to reach *nibbāna,* they believe that they will have a better future. Those who reach the stage of the Non-Returner will be born in a special "Brahma world". Those who become *arahants* gain a special ability to know the future. Qohelet points out that since the future is uncertain we should live our lives to the full instead of cutting ourselves off from the present world. Qohelet thinks that nobody can definitely predict the future because it is beyond human ability to do so.

The Sages and *Arahants*

Arahants are Buddhist saints, regarded by Buddhists as persons who have reached the state of *nibbāna* and have great spiritual power. Therefore many Buddhists try to follow their example and venerate them. In contrast, classical rabbinic Judaism never officially designated a set of human beings as worthy of special reverence or as models of pious behaviour.[17] We may find some good examples in the Hebrew Bible,

[17]Cohn (1988), 44.

but they are not perfect. They should be remembered but should not be venerated. It is quite difficult to find any particular group of people in the Hebrew Bible to compare with *arahants*. However, the sages in the wisdom tradition of the Hebrew Bible had a significant position in Israelite society. Sung-Hae Kim points out that sages are the ideal image of the human in the sapiential tradition of Biblical Israel.[18] They teach people how to live righteously and wisely. They make a clear distinction between the realm of the righteous and the wicked. They tend to think that the righteous will be blessed and the wicked will be punished. Their outlook on the world is dualistic. Similarly, Buddhism uses a basic dichotomy to identify those who become *arahants*. Buddhists believe that *arahants* belong to the realm of ultimate reality and they are free from suffering. In fact, an *arahant* begins as an ordinary householder and has to pass through several processes of transformation. Therefore, according to Buddhism, there is the idea of transformation from one realm to another. However it is not clear whether there is the idea of transformation in the wisdom tradition or not. Can a fool become wise? Sages tend to teach their pupils how to live wisely by pointing out the negative results the wicked normally receive. They warn their pupils not to act like the foolish.

The editor of Ecclesiastes regards Qohelet as a sage (12:9). However, Qohelet himself never claims to be wise. He wants to be wise, but he thinks it is beyond his ability (7:23). He also wonders whether there is a really wise man for he asks a rhetorical question: "Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of things?" (8:1). According to the wisdom tradition, sages are able to discern events and give proper advice for certain situations. Qohelet himself belongs to the wisdom circle for he uses wisdom to investigate things. However, he often disagrees with and discredits the teachings of the sages, especially their dualistic assumptions. Qohelet points out that both the righteous and the wicked will meet the same fate. Qohelet did not know about the existence of the *arahants*. If he heard about their status, he would probably have cast doubt on their ability. In Buddhism, there are some guidelines that can be used to test whether a person really is an *arahant* or not. There will be a committee of monks to ask questions. However, this method has its shortcomings, as a clever monk may be able to sham the answers in this interrogation. Therefore some *arahants* have to perform supernatural actions.

According to Buddhism some *arahants* will obtain supernatural powers which include: 1) magical powers; 2) the divine ear; 3) mind-reading; 4) the divine eye; 5) remembering former existences and 6) the overcoming of deep-seated moral defilement.

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[18]Kim (1985), 182.

Others will obtain spiritual insight. Some may obtain both. It is possible for Buddhists to become *arahants* either through studying or practising meditation. Those who prefer wisdom will normally spend more time on studying. Those who prefer magical powers will spend more time on practising meditation. In the wisdom tradition many sages try to gain more wisdom in the hope that they will be able to understand events in this world. Although Qohelet advocates wisdom, he sees its limitations. He does not think that human beings can change God's plan (7:13). Qohelet himself tries to find ultimate knowledge, but he can only reach the state that enables him to discern what is foolishness (7:25).

Arahants are not only interested in wisdom and supernatural powers, but in moral issues as well. In the Buddhist mode of thinking, there is a spiritual hierarchy and *arahants* are at the top. *Arahants* have the ability to control their mind and reach the state where their desire is fully destroyed. Therefore they are regarded by Buddhists as holy men. Many people come to them for spiritual guidance. After the passing away of an *arahant*, many Buddhists in Thailand keep his ashes for veneration. In the wisdom tradition of the Hebrew Bible, the sages also provide spiritual guidance and they are called the righteous. In Proverbs, the righteous will protect the rights of the poor (29:7) and people rejoice when the righteous are in charge of the city (11:10; cf. 28:12, 28; 29:2, 16). However Qohelet does not have a notion of spiritual hierarchy. He sees that the righteous are mere human beings, he does not honour them as some may do. Once he warns: "Do not be overly righteous, do not be excessively wise; why should you be ruined?" (7:16). He thinks that some people are better off because God favours them, not because of their righteousness. Qohelet does not know why God favours certain people. We may think that Qohelet forsakes moral value. He does not give it up for he also warns: "Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time?" (7:17). Despite the fact that he sees no real advantage in being righteous, he does not encourage immorality. He does not speak for the poor and does not give any hope to the oppressed. But he suggests that a poor wise youth is better than an old foolish king (4:13). Instead of taking political sides, he proposes a moderate life style. His advice seems to focus on the people who can make choices. Therefore the poor and the oppressed seem to be excluded. For him the real sages are those who know how to live a moderate life and learn how to live in this imperfect world. His view is different from the wisdom tradition which holds that sages know the interpretation of things. *Arahants* see that this world is defective, so they decide to leave the world behind. Therefore the Mahāyāna Buddhism tradition criticises *arahants* as selfish, because they are concerned with their own salvation; it calls the perfected one a *bodhisattva* who voluntarily remains in the world to help lesser

beings attain enlightenment. According to the teaching of the Buddha, *arahants* will totally disappear from this world after they die. However, a biography of a modern Thai monk includes a story relating how this monk encountered several *arahants* who had passed away. Many Buddhists also pray to *arahants* who have already passed away. Therefore in Thailand, those *arahants* who have passed away are not completely extinct. Though supernatural power is not the significant proof of *arahantship*, many Thai Buddhists give special attention to those *arahants* who can perform miracles. In fact we might also compare *arahants* with prophets who perform miracles in the Hebrew Bible. But Qohelet does not mention prophets, so we have to leave this comparison to other studies. Since *arahants* are still seen in Thailand, Thai Buddhists are encouraged to seek *nibbāna* because it is still an attainable goal in this modern period.

The idea of living moderately is parallel with the idea of the middle way in Buddhism. Thai people have applied this principle to their daily lives. Thailand is not free from conflicts but some conflicts are resolved because of this principle. Thailand was able to overcome some major threats from foreign countries by applying this concept. Thailand was not colonised because the king of Thailand had made contact with all the super powers. After the Americans left Vietnam and Cambodia, Thailand started diplomatic relationships with the Chinese government right away. Therefore the threat from Communism was eliminated.

Although many Thai people are not able to reach *nibbāna* in this life time, they still support the *Sangha*'s teaching on *nibbāna*. They also support those who want to seek *nibbāna*. Their support for others gives them merits which will enable them to reach *nibbāna* in future lives. Another interesting phenomenon about the religious life of Thai people is that they can move between the religious and secular worlds. Many Thai men enter monkhood for a few days and continue their secular life afterward. In this way many Thai men are able to train themselves in religious discipline and also accumulate merits. Some will become monks for a longer period, but they can also leave any time they want. Most Thai people rarely make any long term religious commitments. They will make a moderate stand on religious matters rather than hold a firm conviction on a particular belief. They know that *nibbāna* should be their final goal, but they are not ready to give up the comfort of the secular world. They also do not want to spend their whole lives in the secular world, so they keep open the option of becoming an *arahant*. Other religions are welcome to teach in Thailand. In my opinion Qohelet's advice of moderation seems to fit the tenor of the Thai mode of practice. I think that this particular teaching of Qohelet will be well accepted by Thai

society. Thai people tend to bend when faced with conflict. Most Thai people prefer to compromise with rather than confront another party.

Work and Merit-making

Some people in Qohelet's time and in modern times work extremely hard. The purpose behind their arduous effort is to gain more wealth. They seem to think that wealth is the only means for achieving real happiness. Qohelet seems to recognise the ambitions of some people of his time. He himself also experienced some frustrations when trying to acquire happiness through wealth. He observes that not everybody who works hard will get more wealth. Some who are able to gain wealth will still not be happy. *Nibbāna* is not the final goal for most Buddhists in Thailand. They think it is unattainable in their life time. They want to postpone it to future lives. They are more interested in material things. Therefore they try to make more merit in the hope that their good deeds will bring about beneficial results in the short-term future. They believe in the law of *Kamma* which teaches that those who practise good deeds will receive rewards. Thus those who aim to reach *nibbāna* also continue to make merit in the hope that they will gain enough merit to improve their opportunity of reaching *nibbāna*.

Qohelet uses two Hebrew verbs, עָמָל and עָשָׂה to refer to the activity of a worker in general. Although these two verbs can be used interchangeably, עָמָל tends to have the connotation of working harder than עָשָׂה. Qohelet uses the verb עָמָל to describe the effort, both physical and mental, of people who crave for more wealth. He observes that many people keep on working despite having much money already. These people do not know their limits. They often work themselves to death. When they realise that they have not enjoyed life, it is often too late. They have no opportunity to enjoy their wealth, but others enjoy it instead. Qohelet uses several examples to display this reality (2:21; 4:8; 5:12-14; 6:2). He often uses a rhetorical question, "What advantage does the worker get for his labour?" to remind his audience that hard work does not always bring about what is hoped for. If Thai people had also been in one of his audiences, he would have asked them, "What boon (advantage) will you get for your merit-making?". Merit-making in Thai is *tum boon*. There is a saying in Thai, "*tum boon dai boon*" which means those who make merit will be blessed. Prior to offering their money as a gift to a religious institution, Thai people often pray for a specific blessing they hope to receive. Qohelet's message for Thai people would be that they will not always receive the blessing according to the merit they make. This

comment would disturb many Thai Buddhists who strongly believe in the law of *Kamma*.

Some modern Thais may not be interested in making merit at all. They are more interested in ways to gain more wealth. In recent years there are more middle class people in Thai society, especially in Bangkok. Many Thai people are able to upgrade their status through education and hard work. Many parents work hard and sell their land to have enough money to send their children to universities in Bangkok. Not all of them succeed. Hoping for a better life, many Thais have to give up their moderate life style in the rural community to live in the competitive world of Bangkok. Some Thais who fail on the first attempt, may give up and return to their home. Some may enter monkhood. Others will try to work as hard as they can to reach their goal. Some will make more merit in the hope that they will be blessed. It is quite normal to see many students going to temples before their exams to make merit and pray to Buddha images for a blessing. When the parents know that their children are going to have exams, they will give more alms to the monks on behalf of their children, so that their children will gain more merit. It is interesting to note that Buddhism does not teach that merit can be transferred. But Thai Buddhists try to transfer their merit to their loved ones, even to the deceased. Qohelet acknowledges that properties can be passed on to descendants and he is disturbed by this fact because he is not certain if the one who is going to inherit possessions will be wise or foolish (2:18-19). Many parents in Thailand work hard to save up for their children. But many of them do not know the value of their inheritance; they spend it all in a short time. Qohelet also feels despair for a man, earning wealth with his wisdom and skill, who has to give his portion to another man who did not labour for it (2:21). Here Qohelet points out that it is possible for some people to inherit wealth without working for it. He also observes that some people just work hard without a reasonable purpose. He sees that it is pointless for a lone man to work very hard and deprive himself of enjoyment (4:8). Qohelet is not against hard working, but he thinks those who work hard should take their time to enjoy the fruits of labour.

In Qohelet's period people laboured with the anticipation that they would get more profit. They were not satisfied with a reasonable return for their investments. They invested their money, time, skill as their "capital asset" and hoped to gain an "income from assets". They did not just work for the living, they were expecting a significant return. After they got a return they would reinvest it to earn more income. They spent most of their time thinking how to get more benefit. They did not have time to rest and enjoy the fruits of their labour. When Qohelet compares these hard working people with an aborted child, he sees that the unborn child had more rest than those

who did not know how to enjoy life. Qohelet does not deny the virtue of work but he does not support the idea of overwork, which is what he means by "toil". Many people work harder than they have to. They earn more possessions than they have the ability to keep. They have many sleepless nights because of their worries over their properties. Instead of overwork, Qohelet advises that each person should work according to his ability and should take time off to enjoy the results of his works. Qohelet does not regard these results as profits, but as portions from God who gives to each individual according to His will. Qohelet reminds his audience that the quantity of possessions does not always bring real happiness. He suggests that human beings should be content with a portion given to them by God. It is useless to have so much wealth but have no time to enjoy it. Many Buddhists in Thailand look for huge profits especially as Thailand begins to participate in the world economy. When starting a new business, many businessmen invite Buddhist monks to come to bless their new offices. They hope that their business will get more profits. In addition they will make merit to enhance the possibility of success. Many companies use merit-making as a means for advertisement. The belief about merit-making seems to be a good method for distributing resources to the poor in the country. Another interesting point that we should consider is that Buddhism teaches detachment from the world. Buddhists should not hold on to the material gains. They should share their profits with others. The more they share the more they will receive because sharing is also regarded as merit-making. It seems as though, in Buddhism, the rich will get more merit. However the poor also have a chance to gain merit, even though they do not have money to give to others, by rejoicing at another person's giving. Since Thai businessmen practise merit-making, their profits do not only contribute more wealth to them but others will receive part of their benefit. Because Thai people deeply believe in merit-making, it is unthinkable to suggest that their work is in vain. If they are not able to enjoy their wealth in this life they hope that they will enjoy it in their next lives. Moreover, if their wealth is enjoyed by other people, they will gain more merit and will have more wealth to be enjoyed in future lives. However, it is only counted as merit if a person has the motive to share his wealth with others. Qohelet's view is different because he does not think that there is an opportunity for human beings to enjoy their wealth after they die.

Qohelet sees that some people work very hard but do not have the opportunity to partake in the fruits of their toil. He feels pity for these people. He also sees that some people have not laboured at all but have a chance to enjoy the wealth of others. Thai Buddhists would not be surprised at this phenomenon because they can see that

those who enjoy the wealth of others had made much merit in their previous lives. Thus in this life they do not need to work as hard as others.

Joy and *Nibbāna*

Although there are various kinds of entertainment available in modern times, many people still do not find satisfaction. Many people try new drugs with the hope that they will be able to get out of this natural world. After observing that there are many unpleasant things that happen to human beings, Qohelet suggests that there is nothing better for them to do than to eat, drink and enjoy life. Qohelet seems to see that enjoyment is the only attainable goal for human beings since the future is uncertain. Likewise Buddhism also sees that there is so much suffering in this world because human beings are so attached to things in this world. The Buddha advises those who want to overcome suffering to detach themselves and seek *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* can be described as the extinction of desire, the destruction of greed, hate and delusion. It seems that most descriptions of *nibbāna* are negative. However Smart notes that *nibbāna* as described in the Pali texts reflects the state of supreme happiness, permanence or deathlessness and cessation of concern with the self.[19] According to these positive descriptions of *nibbāna*, it seems that the idea of enjoying life in Ecclesiastes is similar to the final goal of Buddhism. But if they are carefully observed, it can be noticed that they are quite different.

Their basic assumptions of the world are significantly different. Qohelet believes that this world was created by God. Despite many unpleasant experiences in this world, he acknowledges that there are still many good things which God does for human beings. On the other hand Buddhism does not see any really good things in this world. The Buddha teaches that the good things human beings see in this world are impermanent and can cause disappointment if one is attached to them. Thus the Buddha decided to leave his confortable life and live simply as a beggar. A Buddhist monk is also called *bhikku* which means beggar. Every morning before sunrise monks dressed in yellow robes and having no shoes walk from their temples to local householders who prepare food for them. After receiving alms, monks return to their own temples and share some food with old monks who are not able to walk in the morning and some poor children who use temples as places of shelter. Monks are only allowed to take meals between sunrise and noon. They have to sleep on the floor and restrain from luxurious things. Some monks are vegetarian and some of them do not

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[19]Smart (1993), 47.

touch money. Some monks, instead of living in the community, decide to live in a forest monastery to have more time for meditation. The degree of self-restraint may vary but the principle is the same. Monks live by receiving their basic needs from laypeople. Anything extra is regarded as an indulgence which will draw them away from spiritual disciplines. Qohelet would be surprised to see how Buddhist monks live. He might wonder why these monks have to abstain from all the good things. Qohelet does not see any harm in food and wine.

The idea of enjoying life according to Qohelet is different from hedonism. Qohelet does not advise his audience to pursue pleasure at any cost. In fact from his own experience he found that all the pleasure he received was futile (2:8-11). He regards those who seek only pleasure as foolish. He considers that enjoyment is the reward for work and the consolation for those who face various forms of difficulties. On the other hand Buddhism regards all good things as transient. Human beings will have real happiness only when they are able to cut themselves off from all impermanent things. Buddhist monks eat meals just to survive; they do not worry about the taste of the food. Qohelet, however, sees that eating is not only a means of sustaining life but also a source of satisfaction. Even simple food like bread can give enjoyment (9:7). When I was young my mother always told the story of a poor Chinese family who had only rice for their meal. While they were eating they were laughing. When the next door neighbour who was rich heard their voice, he came out and watched them through the window. He was surprised to find out that each of them only had a bowl of rice and that a small fish hung down from the ceiling. Each of them ate rice and watched the fish and that made them laugh. The rich man had much to eat but he never felt happy. My mother used this story to remind us that we could live happily if we knew how to be content. In this line of thought it seems that Qohelet's view is similar to Buddhism. However Buddhism emphasises self-discipline. Qohelet seems to advise that one should be content with what one has to eat (4:6). If one has less then one should eat less. If one has more one can eat more. On the contrary, Buddhism advises that even one has more, one should eat less.

For Qohelet enjoyment may include pleasure and excitement but he tends to stress the ideas of satisfaction and peacefulness. The person who is satisfied does not want any more. Eating and drinking can fulfil his need. Likewise Buddhism explains that *nibbāna* is the state of cessation of craving. However, for Buddhists to reach this state, they have to use a lot of effort to subdue their desire. Instead of repressing one's want, Qohelet sees that the way to stop craving is to fulfil the need. He thinks that human beings can live happily in this material world. On the other hand Buddhism sees that it is not possible for human beings to get real happiness in this world. They

have to leave this world to obtain it. One description of *nibbāna* is deathlessness. Human beings will stop craving when they die to this world.

Eating, drinking and enjoying life are regarded by Buddhists as unspiritual. However they do not deny material things altogether. Monks have to depend on laypeople for food and other material necessities. In return monks confer merit upon those who are still in the sensory world. Monks do not need to work for food, so they have more time to study the Pali scriptures and more time to meditate. It is easier for them to reach *nibbāna*. However monks will also teach the truth to laypeople, so they too will reach *nibbāna* even though it may take longer. Knowing that they are not able to reach *nibbāna* in this life, many Thai Buddhists in rural villages practise the ideal of "non-attachment" by observing "eight precepts" on the Buddhist observance day. From this practise many Thai Buddhists at least experience *nibbāna* temporarily. It also helps to create a distinctive work ethic that can control greed and selfishness. Likewise, Qohelet's advice on satisfaction also prevents human beings from following greed. He states that those who love money will not be satisfied with money (5:9). Those who are greedy will never fulfil their desire. They always want more. Although Qohelet does not use many religious terms, his advice is spiritual. From other parts of the Hebrew Bible eating, drinking and happiness are positively accepted as part of religious ceremony. Qohelet does not directly refer to these activities as religious affairs, but he regards them as gifts from God. Although some people do not get profit according to their labours, Qohelet sees that the ability to enjoy life is a portion which God gives to human beings as a gift. It is not directly related to the amount of effort they put into their work. God has full power to distribute this gift to anybody He plans. Qohelet does not explain how human beings obtain this gift. He only emphasises that after receiving their portion, human beings should take the chance to enjoy it. They should not seek out more profit.

One of the reasons that makes Qohelet encourage the enjoying of life is the reality of death. The power of death will destroy all the good things that human beings have experienced. Nobody can escape from it. Both the righteous and the wicked will die. No one can know for certain when they will die. No matter how well people live, they will gain nothing when they die. The ability to enjoy life ceases and in fact it begins to decline when people become old. Therefore he advises young people to enjoy life before it is too late. Those who accumulate wealth to enjoy in the future are foolish. Moreover Qohelet thinks that those who can afford to enjoy life but do not derive satisfaction from their wealth are born in vain. It is not clear whether Qohelet believes in life after death or not, but he does not want to postpone the experience of good things until then. Facing the reality of death, Qohelet reminds his audience that

they should live their lives to the full. Admitting that there are many unpleasant things in this world, Qohelet still loves living in it because he sees that God has created many good things for human beings to enjoy. For Qohelet, enjoying life is the positive response to God. It signifies human gratitude toward God and shows that life is meaningful. Enjoyment itself is also meaningful because it signifies that God has approved the work of human beings. On the hand Buddhism teaches that death does not bring life to an end because human beings are reborn. The only way to break the cycle of rebirth is to reach *nibbāna*. It may take longer than one life-time to reach this state. Many Buddhists have to use much effort to reach *nibbāna*. They have to sacrifice many good things to prepare themselves to achieve this final goal. Those who aim for *nibbāna* consider the world to be corrupt and do not want to attach themselves to the world anymore. They want to leave the world behind. They want to be totally extinguished from this world.

Both Qohelet and the Buddha recognise that suffering is the universal problem of human beings. However the ways they respond to this problem are different. Qohelet sees that enjoyment is an appropriate response while the Buddha suggests *nibbāna* as the path to end suffering.

CONCLUSION

We have studied Ecclesiastes in detail, especially chapters six and seven, and have identified and investigated major themes. As a result, it appears that this book is not merely a collection of sayings. Rather, Qohelet was a thinker, not following all the teachings of the wisdom tradition, but disagreeing and challenging many ideas that he regarded as unsound. However, he did not discard the wisdom tradition entirely. He made use of its techniques and language. And, although he saw many weaknesses in the wisdom tradition, he did not embrace other world-views, such as eschatology or Greek beliefs. Rather, he modified wisdom concepts and offered his own insights in response to the frustrations of human experience. He maintained the validity of personal observation and admitted that there were things that he did not understand.

Therefore we may categorise its author as a philosophical thinker. His ideas are sufficiently similar to those of Thai Buddhism to merit comparison between the two systems of belief. As a result, this thesis demonstrates that it is possible to productively compare a single biblical book with some major tenets of another faith. It is not necessary to study biblical books verse by verse. Instead, one may identify their chief theological characteristics and compare them with the distinctive themes of other religions.

The six comparisons which were made between Ecclesiastes and Thai Buddhism might enable Thai Christians to see that the gap between their faith and Buddhism is not as wide as it sometimes appears. This, in turn, offers common ground for dialogue with Thai Buddhists. Our research might also show Thai Christians that many valuable insights can be gained from study of the Old Testament, especially wisdom literature, and that they can effectively use these insights in the Buddhist environment. They should not depend solely on New Testament teachings. Although Ecclesiastes was written about two thousand years ago, it is still useful for Thai Christians in modern times. Its messages are still fresh and relevant to Thai Culture. It provides Thai Christians with a tool for communicating with Thai Buddhists. Likewise, Thai Buddhists will realise that some messages in the Christian Bible are not entirely foreign to them. They can also gain some insights from reading Ecclesiastes and will have an alternative response to human suffering. They will recognise that Christians and Buddhists do share some

basic understanding of human frustration. Moreover, this thesis opens up the much-neglected area of Jewish-Buddhist dialogue.[1]

This thesis provides a paradigm for future research and study in the area of comparison between books in the Hebrew Bible and Buddhism or other religions. Proverbs would merit similar treatment. Or outside wisdom literature, one might want to compare, for instance, the rules and regulations for priests in Leviticus in the Hebrew Bible with the regulations of monastic discipline for monks and nuns in Vinaya-Pitaka in the Pali Canon. Similarly, it would be interesting to compare the role of priests with Buddhist monks, animal sacrifices with merit-making, and Israelite worship with Buddhist meditation. Those who preferred a more general comparison might compare *torah* and *dhamma*. This kind of research helps Christians in the Non-Western world see the benefit of studying Old Testament books in detail. It enhances their ability to apply Christian messages to their own environment. And it will also help Non-Christians understand some of the Christian beliefs.

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[1] Bowker (1970) wrote a book on *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*. This book includes the idea of suffering in Judaism as well as in Buddhism. Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond edited a book entitled *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions* in 1988. Cohn wrote the article, "Sainthood on the Periphery: The Case of Judaism" and Bond wrote the article, "The Arahant: Sainthood in Theravāda Buddhism" in this book. However these books do not provide a direct comparison between the two traditions. My attempt to find material that compares the two traditons was not successful.

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